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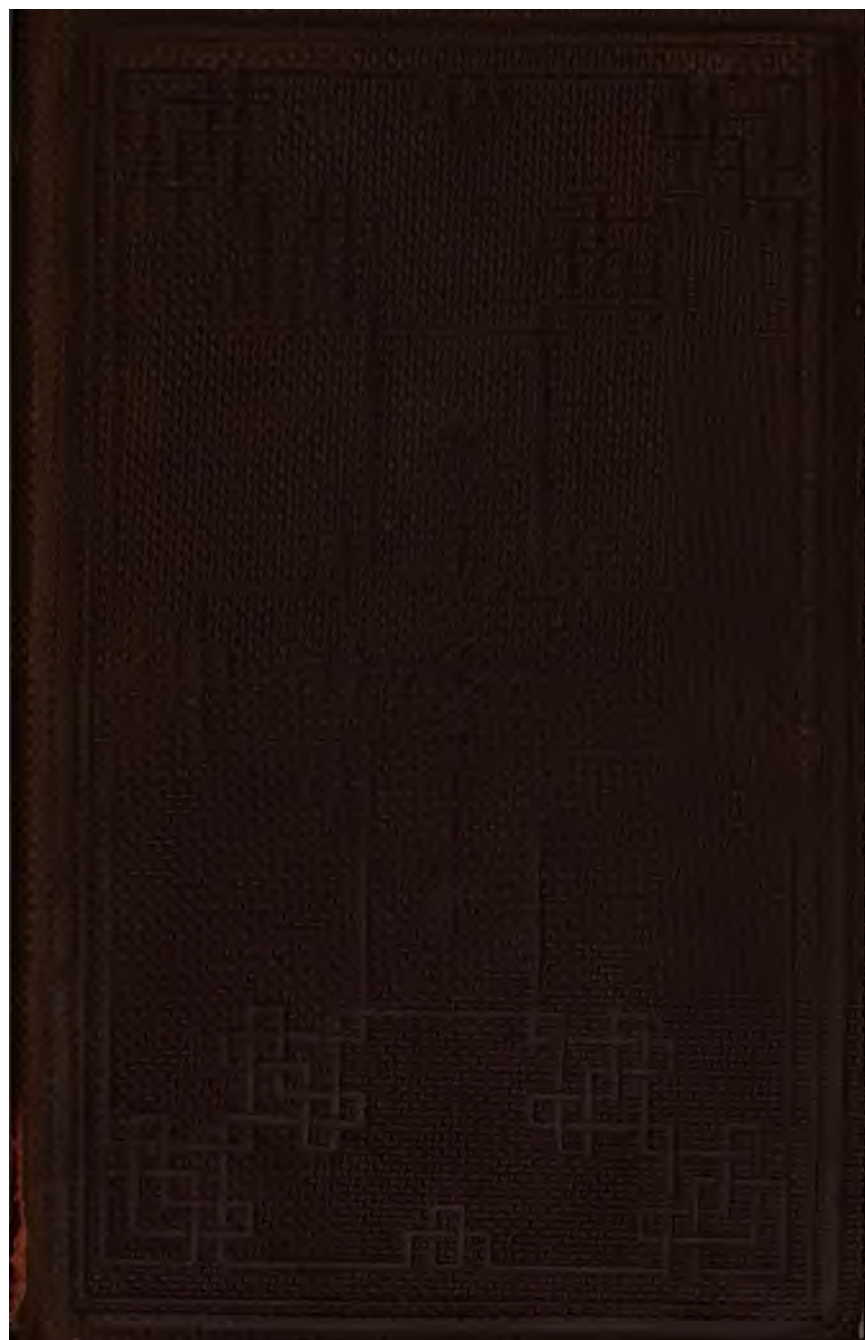
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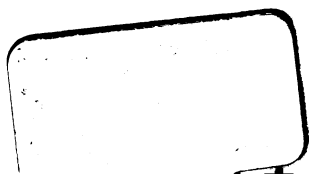
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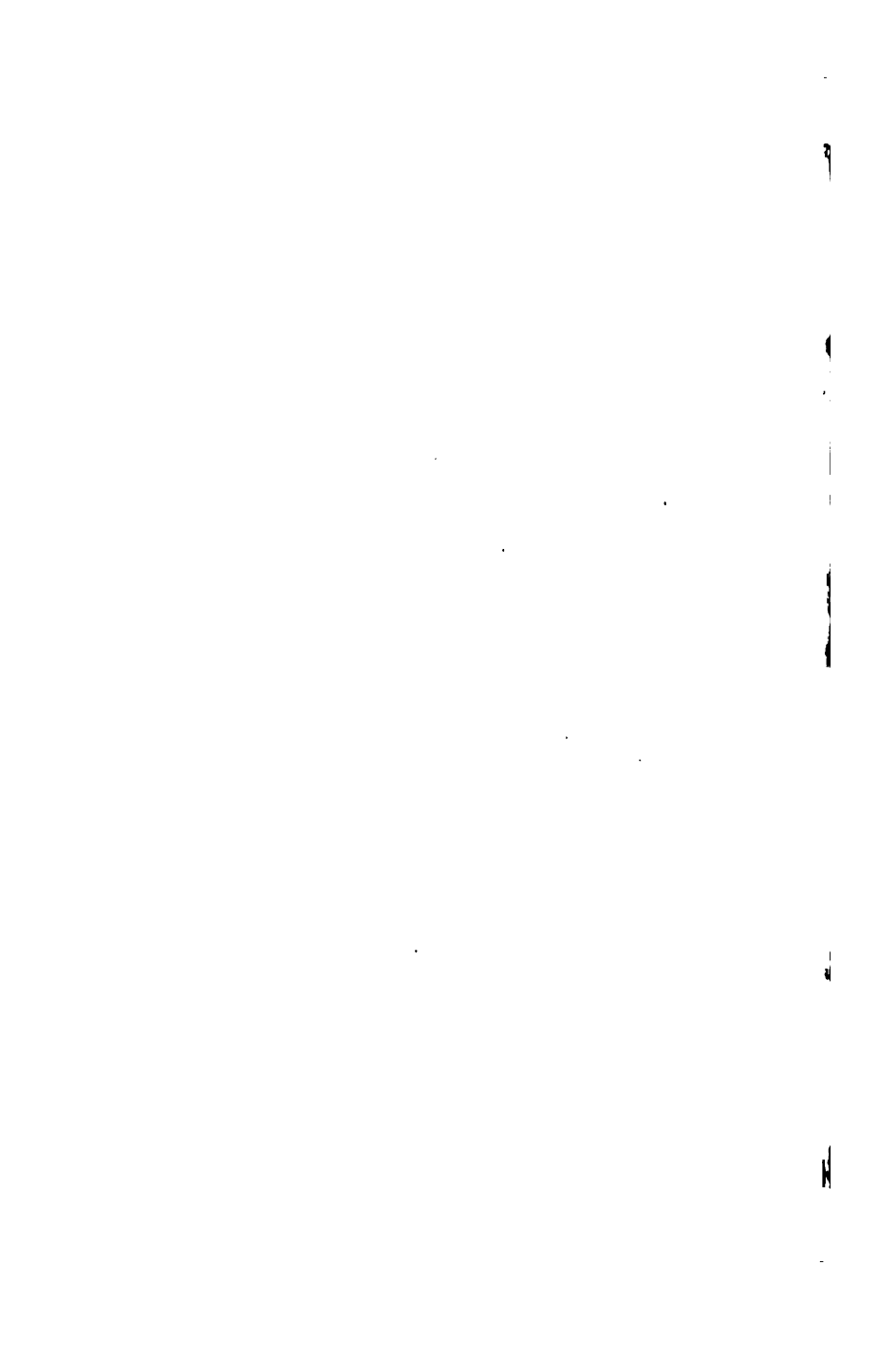
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THE SUMMER-HOUSE IN WHICH MATTHEW HENRY STUDIED AND WROTE PART OF HIS COMMENTARY.

MATTHEW HENRY,

His Life and Times;

A MEMORIAL AND A TRIBUTE.

BY

CHARLES CHAPMAN, M.A.

LONDON:
ARTHUR HALL, VIRTUE & CO.,
25, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1859.

210. C. 107

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.



PREFACE.

THE contents of the following pages were prepared as a Lecture, to be delivered in the Music Hall, Chester. On the delivery of the former part, an urgent request was made by those who were present that I would consent to publish the whole. This request being afterwards repeated by several gentlemen whose judgment I am accustomed to esteem, and being sustained by their expressed conviction that the public would thereby be interested, and the cause of religion promoted, I have felt it to be my duty to comply.

I do not pretend to offer a substitute for the excellent Memoirs that have been published by the late Sir John Bickerton, Williams, and others; nor to discuss in

tedious detail the many topics of importance suggested by the events of Matthew Henry's Life and Times. Brevity and point, combined with interest, have been my aim. In short, my design has been with respect—

— “to those, that have not read the story,
That I may prompt them : and of such as have,
I humbly pray them to admit the excuse
Of time, of numbers, and due course of things,
Which cannot in their huge and proper life,
Be here presented.”

I am indebted to Miss Williams, Duke Street, Chester, for the sketch from which has been taken the engraving of the Summer-house, in which Matthew Henry studied and wrote part of his Commentary.

Hoping that what has been written may contribute, in some degree, to the just appreciation of a truly great and good man, and promote a healthful spirit of piety, I commit it to the considerate perusal of the public.

CHESTER ; Dec. 1858.

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MATTHEW · HENRY,

HIS LIFE AND TIMES.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY.

IN sending forth to the public the present volume, I feel no need of making an apology for taking, as the theme of my address, "The Life and Times of Matthew Henry;" for though we may naturally possess different habits of mind which incline to certain exclusive subjects of study; and though, by education, our tastes may find chief delight in pursuing the paths of science, philosophy, or general history,—yet every one will doubtless allow, that the contemplation of the

character and deeds of a great man is fraught with instruction and entertainment; and that the events of a past age may afford important lessons, from which those who form the present generation may derive permanent benefits. And, although some may, in a few points, differ from him of whom we intend to speak, there surely are few who are not prepared to admire his genuine goodness, and acknowledge the wide-spread influence of his virtuous name.

In approaching this subject it will, perhaps, be proper to make some observations on the occasion and appropriateness of its being chosen in preference to any other, and to assign some reason why I, in particular, have made the attempt to draw general attention to it. Apart from the ordinary interest always felt, and the special interest now being awakened in the character and labours of the Henry family,—the relation in which I stand to the church once under the pastoral care of Matthew Henry, is somewhat peculiar, and

to some persons interesting. A few of my readers may not need to be informed that it is my happiness to be the pastor of the Independent church, assembling in Queen Street chapel, Chester, but there may be some of them who do not know, that that church is descended from, and is the representative of, the orthodox Church which enjoyed the privilege of listening to the sound evangelical teaching of Matthew Henry. There is not the slightest doubt but that he held, taught, and published those great fundamental truths respecting the fallen condition of mankind, the Divine nature of Jesus Christ, the vicarious nature of His death, and the need of a renewal of heart by the Holy Spirit, which we in England consider to be the very essence of true scriptural doctrine, and the basis of all permanent Christian activity. And those who are acquainted with the religious history of the last century know that, after his death on to the year 1780 or 1790, there was a gradual

falling away, by some in the Establishment and out of it, from orthodox views to the Arian and Socinian heresies. It is possible that many persons have sought, and are still seeking, for a solution of that singular phenomenon. I do not now pretend to enter fully into the question, as to how this decline from the truth is to be accounted for. It may have arisen from the method of introducing members or communicants into the church—that privilege depending on the sole authority or permission of the minister, and therefore a change in his opinions would easily and soon manifest itself in the church; or, from the want of practical work for the people in spreading the Gospel abroad, or in providing for the instruction of the poor and ignorant at home,—since an absence of activity on the part of the people, will either tend to formality, or, to undue speculation on mysterious doctrines; or from that too great fondness for speculative truth, which the doctrinal controversies of the age naturally awakened,

and which the philosophical theories of the period strengthened—a fondness which disdains to receive, even on the verbal testimony of the Almighty, statements which the intellect cannot comprehend; or from the preachers of the Gospel insensibly losing sight of the great leading doctrines of redemption, in their excessive eagerness to give prominence to the present importance of a strictly moral life in our various earthly relations; or from the children of the pious inheriting the morality, the privileges, and the respect of their parents, without possessing that change of heart by the Holy Spirit which is the best safeguard from intellectual pride. It may, I say, have arisen from one, or from some, or from all these and other causes combined; but so is the fact, however accounted for, that many, who called themselves Christians, departed from what we believe to be the essentials of the Christian system.

The church in Crook Street in the City of Chester, was no exception. Some years after

the death of Matthew Henry, there was a gradual decline from sound doctrine on the part of the minister, and, through him, of some of the congregation. But, amidst many defections, there were some who retained evangelical sentiments. Finding that it was impossible to worship in comfort with those who differed so widely from them, and seeing that the others would not remove from the place, they, with a view to perpetuate the doctrines which Matthew Henry taught, and with the hope of more effectually extending the kingdom of the Divine Redeemer, withdrew. They assembled together, for a short time, in a temporary building situate in Commonhall Street, and at last erected an Independent chapel in Queen Street. When that event took place, they drew up Articles of Faith—Articles based on the *doctrinal* Articles of the Church of England and the Assembly's Catechism—Articles pointedly intended to mark the Anti-Socinian character of their creed, and to vindicate or justify their procedure in opening

a new place of worship; and with them they drew up a covenant, or solemn agreement, embracing the duties and obligations of Christians who profess to be members of the Church of Christ. These articles and this covenant, signed by the authors themselves on January 30th, 1772, are now in my possession; and, as a memorial of the past and a reminder for the present, are generally read to the church on the first Sabbath of every New Year. I am also informed by some of the elder members of the church, that for many years a copy of Matthew Henry's "Commentary" was kept at Queen Street Chapel, in honour of the beloved author, and to be lent out to the poor members of the church for their instruction. From these circumstances it will be perceived that there is, at least, a personal interest, and also a connexional congruity in my publishing some memorial of the Life and Times of Matthew Henry, and a tribute to the excellence of his character.

In consequence of the absence of great blemishes and prominent inconsistencies in the character of Matthew Henry, there is danger, lest, in eulogising his excellences, we seem to forget that he was imperfect like ourselves. And some may be afraid of a delineation of the various features which go to make up his moral worth, lest we should pay undue homage to the man, unmindful of the Giver of all good. If, however, in any of my remarks, I appear to dwell particularly on his virtues, I wish all to remember that he was but a *man*; and that what we admire in him is, that, by the Grace of God, he, in the midst of temptations to ease and indulgence, and amidst persecutions and cares, was enabled to subdue so much of the *man*, and to exhibit so much of what is *Heaven-born*. I certainly can see no valid reason why we should not describe and admire the works of God, as seen in an individual character, as well as in the combinations of colour and form in the material world. "The works of

God are sought out by all those who take pleasure therein." I envy not the man who can stand amidst the varied scenery of this beautiful world without being urged, by his own instincts, to mark one by one the beauties that lie within the range of his vision, and who feels not his bosom swell with emotion on the contemplation of their variety and extent. Nor is that to be regarded as a desirable state of mind, which is either blind to the moral beauties of a noble character, or feels no desire to trace them in their various combinations. Most certainly the world around us has been made beautiful by our Creator, that we, by seeing it, may be made glad; and so also the products of His mercy, wisdom, and power, as seen in the lives of the good and the great, were intended, as one reason among others, to arrest our attention, afford instruction, and increase our pleasure. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright," is the language of one who considered the heavens, and traced the

progress of the storm. And just as we continue to delineate and admire the physical beauties of creation,—although some few may, in their excessive admiration, lose sight of the plastic hand that fashioned all, and render to nature a homage which belongs to nature's Author,—so also, though a few, in their extravagant esteem for human greatness, forget Him from whom it all proceeds, and, by being absorbed with the charms of His creation, deprive the Creator of a supreme veneration,—*we* now desire to point out and admire the excellences of Henry, that, by so doing, we may do honour to Him, whose pure spirit he so brightly reflected.

Among the many means which the Author of our being has instituted for educating the mind and heart of man, not least in importance is the observation of the virtues of personal life. If the ardent pursuit of the abstract science of mathematics or metaphysics gives acuteness, correctness, and rapidity to the movements of the higher

intellectual faculties; if the diligent cultivation of classical studies makes the expression of human thoughts and feelings more tasteful, energetic, and pleasurable to the ear; if a general knowledge of history enlarges our conceptions of the true principles of human progress, and opens the way to an intimate acquaintance with the development of human nature in its nobler as well as in its baser forms,—beyond all doubt, our private and social life may be moulded and influenced by a careful consideration of those who, in private, lived more like angels than men, and who caused the domestic circles in which they moved to abound with hallowed joys.

I confess that I feel some diffidence and fear in attempting to portray the life of Matthew Henry, in a manner corresponding to the merits of the man, and the good which a just representation of his character ought to produce. His character possesses no singularities or eccentricities which give a novelty and freshness to the description. There

are no angularities, no awkward features in his temperament which show off to advantage those that are more retiring and pleasing. No great discoveries in the laws and system of the universe ask for the eulogistic phrase; no brilliant efforts of poetic genius send their mighty spell over the feelings of men in all ages; nor can attention be drawn to national demonstrations in honour of his deeds. On the other hand, I have to describe a truly great man, whose greatness consisted chiefly in his uniform goodness. His light will never be extinguished, but it was not, and is not seen by all the world. The quiet closet was the fostering place of his greatness, and the family or social circle the sphere of its first influence. There is in him a gentleness blended with energy, a tranquillity and self-possession so constant, a piety so simple and yet so strong and profoundly intelligent, a benevolence so quiet and regular in its flow, an earnestness so real and yet unpretending, and all these so intermingled and combined,

that it is difficult to fix the mind on any one of them apart from the others, and to say where one begins and the other ends. However, difficult as my task is, I trust that any lack of interest which may arise from my inability to do justice to the subject, will be made up by the reader's regard for him of whom I am to speak.

CHAPTER II.

—♦—
HISTORICAL.

THE date of Matthew Henry's birth takes us back to strange times—about 200 years from the present day. I do not think that we can understand what he really was, the precise value of his moral character, and the effect of his life of self-denying labour, unless we take a view of the events of the period and the influences among which he first grew to man's estate. Nothing in this world should be estimated solely in a state of isolation. Character is always relative. Every man is best seen in the original sphere of his action, surrounded by the persons and objects that shaped the particular course of his conduct.

Let us not therefore abstract Matthew Henry from the troublous times of the 17th century. Let us not think of him as some ideal personage breathing in no atmosphere, treading on no soil, acquiring no local manners, and having no commerce with mankind. Closing our ears to the whistle of railway-engines and the rattle of cabs ; forgetting that our houses, our halls, and our streets enjoy the benefit of gaslight ; supposing that there are no stiff policemen to guard our property, no newspaper press to afford us daily information from abroad, no mechanics' institutions, no ragged and Sunday-schools, no missionary or Bible societies, no certain quietude in our towns and cities, and no clear, undoubted right and privilege to worship the God of our salvation when and where and how we please ; and imagining that the fields are but partially cultivated, that the roads are difficult and dangerous, that pack-horses are the principal means of conveyance, that one church seeks the

extinction of all others, that Chester, his scene of labour, is in danger of being besieged by an army led on by men of daring courage, that the Sovereign of the realms is driven from the throne, and obliged to fight for his assumed prerogatives,—and we shall then have some general notion of the state of things in Chester and in England just prior to the year that saw the entrance of Matthew Henry into the world.

I believe it to be true, in some degree, that an *ordinary* man is chiefly made, or moulded, by the age in which he lives; and that an *extraordinary* man makes or moulds the age to his own character and genius. It would be untrue, and contrary to general opinion, to affirm that Matthew Henry was merely an *ordinary* man, and that, therefore, he bore in his character no distinctive peculiarities, but only such as any man would exhibit who happened to live at the same time and in the same place. And equally untrue would it be to ascribe to him the independence of power

and the greatness of genius which turn the current of a nation's feelings, or stamp upon the generation the impress of his own mental nature. Here, as in some other similar instances, the truth lies in the mean between the two extremes. He possessed attributes of character which were independent of any circumstances, and gave a colouring to the nation's moral life, while there was so much of mediocrity in his abilities as to make him somewhat susceptible to the moulding influences of the seventeenth century. Many will, therefore, I presume, be of the same opinion as myself, when I say that, to see the man *as he was*, it is important to convey ourselves back in thought to a bygone age.

Doubtless, most persons know well, that the period which elapsed from the Reformation in the early part of the sixteenth century to the accession of William III. to the throne of England, was one in which political and religious parties were opposed in the most bitter and terrible struggles. Then the great

principles on which rests our freedom from the power of Rome were tested and established. Although, for the sake of illustration and correct delineation, I now call attention to that period, let it not by any means be supposed that it is with the intention or desire of reviving animosities that are better dead and buried for ever, or of arraying the weakness of one party in front of the strength of another. No ; let erring men be forgiven ; let petty rivalry perish ; let the dead rest in peace, and the living enjoy the issue of their sad conflict, in the spirit of men who are fully persuaded in their own minds, but are nevertheless bound together by the genial feelings of the heart, if not by the conclusions of the intellect. May I not assume, that all considerate men are influenced by the sentiment that would prompt us to say, "Farewell to the harsh, bitter, hateful words and deeds of an intolerant age ; and welcome the independence, the frankness, the candour, of an age which admits and admires the advocacy of opinions

expressed in the language of propriety and the spirit of a Christian."

The reformation which took place in the religion of England during the reign of Henry VIII., introduced changes in the religious affairs of this country which have not yet ceased to operate. During the period preceding the overthrow of the Papal authority, the people had but one faith, one form, and one practice. Religious controversies were rare, and, when they existed, they were confined within the pale of one ecclesiastical system. There was, indeed, at that time unity and uniformity,—but it was the unity of a spiritual despotism, and the uniformity of a corrupt ritual. The fundamental principle of the Reformation was, *the right of private judgment upon the sacred Scriptures*. The admission of this principle led men to read, think, and inquire; and it resulted in the rejection of an authority which assumed to be infallible, and the establishment of a new form of church government believed to be more in

harmony with the rights of private Christians and the teachings of the Word of God. Chiefly under the guidance of Cranmer, a new episcopacy was formed, in which, as in the Church of Rome, various orders of consecrated persons were recognised; a Liturgy composed or compiled, and Henry VIII. made the temporal head of the Church. After the improvements and corrections of the reign of the pious Edward VI., came the cruel and murderous reign of the Bloody Mary, when men of God, true to the faith once delivered to the Saints, were doomed by the evil genius of a wicked persecuting power to pass through the ordeal of protracted tortures, or the pains of a martyr's death. Roman Catholicism, then, for the last time it is to be hoped, lifted up in England its blood-stained hands and showed its death-like head; while Protestantism bled and languished, or was driven to seek refuge among the Reformed Churches at Geneva or Zürich. After Queen Mary had been summoned by the Avenger of the Saints to a

higher tribunal, and Elizabeth had assumed the reins of government, the hopes of the Reformers revived. Men who had been Protestant in heart, but to save their lives had become Romanists by profession, now expressed their true feelings. The faithful, who had been concealed beyond the searching power of papal emissaries, now came forward. Some of the exiles returned from the Continent, and many of the Romanists were urged, by their own guilty fear of suffering as they had punished others, to call themselves Protestants. Those who had lived on the Continent, especially those who, during the reign of Mary, had gone to Geneva, saw there modes of worship, rules of discipline, and habits of life which had been almost unknown to the English Catholics and English Protestants of a previous age. They there listened to the teaching of such able expounders as Calvin and his colleagues, and were accustomed to pray and praise with holy men, who called their one instructor, "Minister,"

“Pastor,” “Bishop,” “Presbyter,” according to the particular function of his office they wished to indicate. There they recognised no one teacher, preacher, or spiritual guide to be superior in power or dignity to another. Hence it was, that on their return to England, some of them sought the privilege of worshipping according to this, as they believed, primitive form of church regulations. Most—not all—of those who had remained in England during the persecution, retained their preference for an Episcopal form of church government, in which a distinction is made between bishops, priests, and deacons, and which admits the sovereign ruler of the realm to be the temporal head. Presuming that, as before the Reformation there had been but *one* form of church government,—the papal, and, as I think, not fully comprehending the nature and inevitable consequences of the great principle of the right of private judgment, the Episcopal party being strong, endeavoured by rigorous enactments to suppress the attempt to establish a commu-

nion not conformed to their own. Persecution often urges to extremes. No one is ever truly converted by it. It only excites bitterness of spirit, and if men are not greatly restrained by the grace of God, they will, while under oppression, be led to say and do unchristian things by way of retaliation. And such was, in a few cases, the effect on those early Nonconformists. They resisted the restraints of law; they said hard, and, perhaps in some instances, unjust things of the Queen and her officers; they seemed, by their habits and language, in the estimation of their enemies, to affect a superior tone of piety; they denounced the assumed authority of the opposite party with a studied vehemence and downright honesty of spirit, and were, in consequence, soon known and described by their oppressors as the long-faced, censorious, sanctimonious Puritans.

In a country like England, where the political principles of the constitution secure for every man a large amount of liberty, both of speech and action, it seems unreasonable to

attempt to confine all men by force of law within the pale of one ecclesiastical system. The sturdy character of our people has ever shown itself in the vigour with which they have defended their shores from the invasion of foreign foes ; and it is but in accordance with the nature of things, that this feature of our national constitution and character should appear in reference to the maintenance of private views respecting church government. Seeing that the question is not one of fundamental articles of faith, but of regulations and ceremonies, it seems to me to be as impossible to confine every Christian Englishman within the limits of one system, as it is to prescribe for the rays of light coming from the sun, a barrier over which they must not pass ; or, to try and include all tribes and nations of the earth within the limits of one political rule.

The danger to which the country was exposed, in consequence of the threatened Spanish invasion, induced the religious parties to keep their differences in the back ground, and to

unite their strength in opposing one common enemy; which, like men of sense and patriotism they did, and that right nobly. But, subsequently, during the reigns of James I. and Charles I., the various religious sections assumed their former attitude of oppression on the one hand, and obstinate resistance on the other. England then reached to a state of excitement, turmoil, confusion, and distraction, politically and ecclesiastically, which God grant may never again be witnessed. The claims of Charles to exercise the power of raising money independently of the Parliament, brought forward a race of men in opposition to his wishes, who, whatever may be thought of the justice or injustice of their cause, were certainly never surpassed for their untiring activity and unflinching determination. The Parliamentary cause triumphed. Chester among other cities, was besieged and possessed by the troops of the victorious party. Cromwell, led on, perhaps further than he at first intended, became the head of the

State. At length the day of his departure to another world arrived, and he followed the unfortunate king to the common resting-place of our mortal frame. It was at that period,—during and after his life, that the struggles of the opposing religious parties were most severe. During the Parliamentary war, the ranks of the Non-conformists were greatly increased and the Episcopacy was, for a time, abolished. Learned men had written much on both sides. Every party was earnest. Political opinions mingled with and often gave bitterness to religious controversies. All was in confusion. At last, men of quiet habits became weary of incessant conflict, and longed for repose. There was a brief lull in the storm. Then it was that Charles II. found a welcome to the throne, and sought by various means to restore some degree of order.

Having proceeded thus far in giving this historical account of religious parties, let me now, in order to show the true position of Matthew Henry, just point out the relation,

one to the other, of the principal religious bodies on the accession of Charles II. to the throne. There were three great parties in the Ecclesiastical world, each aspiring to obtain the supremacy, or at least to prevent the supremacy of any *one* from interfering with the freedom of the other two—the Episcopalian, the Independent, and the Presbyterian. In consequence of the changes that took place in the Church of England during the struggle with Charles I., great diversity in the opinions of persons holding livings was the result. There were three classes of men holding the livings, and preaching in the churches; 1, the High Episcopalians, who believed that no ordination was valid but that from an Episcopal Bishop, and, that it was illegal and unscriptural for any man to preach who had not been so ordained; 2, the High Presbyterians, who believed in the *jus divinum* of Presbyterianism, and held that only ordination by elder ministers was scripturally valid, and had themselves been so ordained; 3, the

moderate Presbyterians, who did not firmly hold the *jus divinum* of Presbyterianism, but held that Episcopal or Presbyterian ordination were equally valid—yet preferred the latter.

Now, when the church and country were in this condition, *i. e.* in 1662, there was living with Katherine, his excellent wife, at the village of Worthenbury, in the county of Flint, a heavenly-minded man, and useful preacher of the Gospel, known by the name of Philip Henry. On the 24th of August, the Anniversary of St. Bartholomew's day, he intended to preach at Bangor, a sermon appropriate to the remembrance of the horrid transaction which gave the day its notoriety. But he was prevented from so doing; for, on that very day, there came into force an act known as the "Act of Uniformity," by which 2,000 holy and useful ministers were ejected from their livings, and not allowed to preach on pain of imprisonment. That was a sad day for many homes. Holy men knew not where to look for the bread that perisheth,

and bitter, bitter tears were shed by mothers, who, houseless, and money-less, pictured the future sorrows of their children.

This stringent measure was felt by the victims of it to be most unmerciful, and perhaps there are few, if any, now, who would assert its justice. There was much in the position and character of these men that merited far milder treatment, even if for the sake of securing in the Establishment a pure Episcopacy, *i. e.*, an Episcopacy without any Presbyterian or Independent element in it, they must leave the church. Had they been uneducated, ignorant, coarse, fanatical men; intellectual unfitness for the responsible position they held might have been pleaded as a reason for forcible expulsion; but, no; they were men of profound learning, trained by severe study to be the guides of others, as is attested by the volumes now to be found in every well-selected theological library. Had they been animated by a treasonous spirit against the king, fond of urging the

people to rebellion, and eager to see again the dire calamities of a civil war; then the safety of the constitution and the peace of the land would be valid reasons for the suppression of their voice, the loss of their homes, and the confinement of their persons. Far otherwise was it with them; they had been no more forward in the Parliamentary cause than many of their oppressors; they waited upon the king and presented him with a handsome Bible when he came to London to succeed to the Crown, and they, in private life, were men of peace and prudence. Could it have been shown that their life was immoral, that they neglected their reponsible duties; then, all would have pronounced them unfit to be the ambassadors of a spotless Redeemer, and their dismissal in shame and disgrace would have been hailed by the wise and good as a blessing to mankind; but such men as Richard Baxter, who, when suffering persecution, could write the "Saints' Rest," and John Howe, author of

the "Living Temple," were free from the stains of vice. Could it have been made clear that they had departed from the faith of the Apostles, or the doctrinal articles of the Church of England, and had taught doctrines decidedly heretical, then, the purity of the faith, and the honour of Christ, would have suggested their speedy, though not cruel, removal from the office of Christian teacher; yet their works, now existing, show that never were men more sound and more earnest in upholding orthodox doctrine than they. Had it been discovered that by certain practices they were leaning towards Rome, and, under the sanction and patronage of a pure church, were insensibly leading the people into the errors of a corrupt church; then, certainly the sooner, with a due regard for their feelings as men and as parents, they were dismissed and deprived of the influence which a position in an Established Church always gives, the better; but far otherwise—they were men who looked upon Rome as

the "Mother of Harlots," the seat and source of spiritual despotism, the foe of true liberty, and the barrier to a nation's progress.

It might seem to us that such conduct adopted towards such men, would have excited the people to rebellion and endangered the peace of the country. Such would have been the case at some periods of English history, and even then, if the sufferers had been men of another stamp. But the people had seen conflict enough. The walls of our old cities were scarcely repaired from the injuries of sharp contests ; the desolation of the fields was barely removed by the revival of agriculture ; the loss of property by the unsettled state of public feeling was not yet retrieved ; the sufferings and tears of by-gone years were still fresh on the memory ; the presence in most towns of widows and fatherless children, was a living testimony against war, and the claims of family relations demanded attention. The people were weary of strife, and more than that, the ejected ministers were men of

peace, and professed to serve Him whose servants cannot fight, because His "Kingdom is not of this world." They felt deeply; but revenge was not cherished. They mourned, but did not recriminate; they wept, but prayed not for vengeance. The weapons of their warfare were not carnal. The records left of their patience under poverty, their hunger, their anxieties, their "strong crying and tears," and their imprisonment, are very precious. Knowing that men are liable to err, and that the Judge of all the earth will do rightly, they committed themselves to Him.

It is not for us just now to sit in judgment on our ancestors. We know that the rulers of that day were but men. Nor is this the time to pronounce a decided opinion as to what course should have been adopted to restore order, or regularity of appointment in the Church. Let it suffice, if I suggest, whether it is expedient, at any time, to put good ministers of the Gospel to political

tests, as a condition of their holding office in the Church of Christ, and especially to such tests as those required by the Act of Uniformity ;—whether, even if the Presbyterians, when in power, treated the Episcopalians severely, there should have been a rendering of evil for evil ;—whether the presence of two thousand men who were willing to sacrifice their comforts, their homes, and expose themselves to imprisonment for the sake of their religious convictions, does not prove that many more held similar opinions, but had not courage to maintain them in the face of persecution ;—whether the Episcopal or any other system is so clearly of Divine authority, so minutely described in the New Testament, and so demonstrably, in its first principles and regulations, in accordance with the practice of the churches of Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, and Jerusalem, as that it cannot be reconsidered, enlarged, reformed, or modified, so as to retain two thousand useful and learned men, and open the door for the

admission of as many more ;—whether the known piety, orthodoxy, and ability of so many men should be so discountenanced, and, as far as possible, rendered useless to a nation, rather than make some change to meet their wishes ; and finally, whether men, who had spent many years of their ministry with only the ordination of presbyters or elder ministers, might not be allowed, in consideration of their age, piety, families, and past usefulness, to finish their ministry where they commenced it, and to close their lives in peace, without being required to undergo another ordination and thereby declare,—that all the past deeds of their ministerial life were of no authority,—that they, all that time, had been unqualified for the sacred office, and that many years avowal and belief that they were Heaven appointed ministers of Christ, was in fact the avowal and belief of a lie !

Although the severity with which they were punished for what many esteem a virtue rather

than a crime, may cause us to regret that any men calling themselves Christians and Englishmen, should have so far forgotten the benign spirit of the religion of Christ, and have had recourse to measures which the Lord of love would shun; perhaps on the whole the world has been a gainer, and the principles of the Gospel have acquired distinguished honour, by the fact that mankind have, in this decided conduct of the sufferers, seen that, in some of its professors at least, Christianity is not a mere matter of hereditary tradition, and observance of set forms of ecclesiastical order, but a power in the heart; holding conscience sacred, and causing temporal considerations to dwindle into insignificance, when they come into collision or competition with truths verily believed. And however much faith men may have in the ecclesiastical opinions of the promoters of these harsh proceedings, few perhaps will be unwilling to confess that the successors of those devoted servants of God, inheriting

their convictions and exercising them under the more liberal rule of a more worthy sovereign, have contributed in no small degree to the promotion of the principles and practice of a rational, civil freedom, to the preservation of our country from the insidious advances of popery, and, not least, to the extension of popular education, and evangelical piety at home and in distant lands. It is a significant fact that Great Britain, with her sound Gospel doctrines, and Episcopal, Presbyterian, Independent, and Wesleyan forms of Church discipline, has raised up more useful religious institutions, and done more for the diffusion of the truth in distant lands, than can be affirmed of any other country holding the same doctrines, but preserving or enforcing one uniform method of Church government.

I have felt it to be due to Philip and to Matthew Henry, thus to place this matter before the reader. I have done so that it may be seen that their moral character was not at

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all involved in their non-conformity, and that they followed in the course of many good and great men of the age. It would have been unjust to them, and not quite truthful to others, had I not called attention to this portion of ecclesiastical history.

CHAPTER III.



NARRATIVE.

WE will proceed at once to the narrative of Matthew Henry's life.

There is at this day about one mile from the town of Whitchurch, in Shropshire, an old-fashioned farm-house, containing many relics of a past age, and some of the comforts, if not many of the elegances and refinements of the present. In this house—called Broad Oak*—Philip Henry took up his abode at Michaelmas of the year 1662, about five or six weeks after his ejection from the Church, because

* Broad Oak is really in Flintshire, although in the north of Shropshire. North Salop contains an isolated part of the county of Flint.

he would not conform to the requirements of the Act of Uniformity ; and in this same house, on October 18th, 1662, it was his happiness to see an increase in his family in the person of his second son Matthew. Among the many blessings that fall to the lot of children, the one most to be desired is the care and affection of pious parents ; and among the many methods by which fathers and mothers may become benefactors to unborn generations, the most pleasing and certain is, to give their children the benefit of a holy example and affectionate prayers to God on their behalf. This greatest of children's blessings was enjoyed by young Matthew, and this honoured privilege of parents was exercised by his parents. His father was a man of enlightened intellect, of sweet, placid disposition, of regular habits, and of undoubted devotion ; and, from what we can learn of his mother, she was one who walked with God, brought her piety to bear upon the details of domestic life without

making it obtrusive, and often with maternal tenderness prayed for her offspring. The domestic arrangements of the family were of such a nature as would exert a good influence on the growing mind of the youth. In those days of severe trial the family of an ejected Nonconformist was, in a great measure, cut off from many opportunities of associating with others. With the exception of a few who appreciated their moral worth, they had no intimate acquaintances; and, moreover, the strict morality of their lives, and the great prominence given to religion in all their intercourse, were in striking contrast with the corrupt tendencies of the Court and the general effect produced by the Book of Sports. Means of communication with friends at a distance were few and difficult to obtain. Nor were the young people amused and instructed by a cheap popular literature; while we all know that the exciting effect of a brisk Polka or a rousing March was never produced by young

ladies exercising their musical powers and digital muscles on ~~the~~ **keys** of the piano-forte. Although we may think that they suffered some inconvenience for want of variety in household amusements and comforts, yet there was this advantage, it bound their hearts more closely together, it made home a sacred place, and threw them back on their parents for instruction and pleasure. And a happy thing it will be for England, if we retain the private and domestic character of our family circles. Long may the day be distant,—may it never come,—when our young people lose taste for the sobrieties of the fireside by acquiring a taste for midnight amusements at the ball and the theatre; and give up the cheering smiles that enliven the family table, for the formality or familiarity, as the case may be, of the continental *Table d'Hôte*, or forsake the winter evening's laugh, talk, or work for a round of endless gaiety abroad. If the bulwarks of England are her ships, if her white cliffs are better than an

army of one hundred thousand men, and if the waves that wash her shores are Heaven's strongest material defence, the family hearth is her *heart*, where her best blood is kept warm and active, and her power for great deeds is sustained. From thence goes forth the energy that gives vigour and support to her constitution, and there, when free from the poison and pollution of Jesuitical confessions, lie the seat and source of her moral strength and greatness.

From early youth Matthew Henry saw and heard the signs and fruits of piety at home. Before he could understand he listened to the fervent prayer night and morning at the domestic altar. In the countenance of his father, his eye daily gazed upon calmness, gladness, affection and hope. The sacred book was read and expounded every day. The afternoon and evening of Saturday were devoutly set apart for reflection, prayer, and preparation for the Sabbath. Philip Henry was accustomed to say that there were

“Three things comfortable to reflect upon—an affliction borne patiently; an enemy forgiven heartily; and a Sabbath sanctified uprightly.” In that happy home the Sabbath was indeed observed—observed so as to make it a day of rest and yet of mental activity, a day of retirement from the cares and pursuits of life, and yet a day of preparation for them,—a day of serious exercises, and yet a day of genuine pleasure.

Under these influences Matthew lived, and, by the Divine blessing, obtained benefits which were never lost. Early in life he became the subject of that great change of disposition which in the New Testament is described as “passing from death unto life.” Its reality is attested not only by his subsequent life, but by the deep contrition and need of redemption he felt, and by the heart-searching care he displayed in coming to the conclusion that he was a renewed child of God.

The value of learning was known to his father, and inasmuch as Philip Henry pos-

sessed sufficient private property to make him independent of extraneous assistance, he intended that his son should have all the advantages which their position as Nonconformists in a rural district could command. At the age of nine the powers of Matthew were sufficiently developed to enable him to compose Latin verses, and read a portion of the Greek Testament. Without venturing to affirm that his Latin approximated very nearly to the purity and correctness of Horace or Virgil, or that they contained truly grand poetic conceptions, nevertheless the circumstance shows that his mind was above mediocrity; that as a lad he was acquiring the habits of industry, for which he was ever distinguished, and that there was some reason for his mother's anxiety lest he should injure his health by too close application to study.

Natural tendencies often show themselves very early in life, and it is wise for all who have to do with the training of the young, that their natural tastes and aptitudes be dis-

covered, and made to regulate their education or their settlement in life. Philip Henry was observant, especially of the character of his children. He soon discovered that his son Matthew was a pious youth, that he had a taste for books, and a power of thinking and speaking (for it is not every book-worm that can think for himself or speak for the instruction of others), and an inclination for the Christian ministry. Even then, while a lad, his expository power was exercised, for on certain occasions he would gather together his brothers and sisters and preach to them after his own fashion. Nothing gave Philip Henry more pleasure in prospect, than the thought that, by the blessing and guidance of God, Matthew might, some day, become a useful minister of the Gospel. But, with his characteristic prudence, he said nothing to urge him to undertake so solemn a position. It is a great pity, a hindrance to the cause of truth, and an injury to a son, when parents, to gratify a feeling of their own, press and

induce him to devote himself to the work of the ministry, without duly considering whether he has the piety, the aptitude to teach, the power of utterance, the intellectual strength, and the habits of perseverance, which will enable him to fill the office with comfort to himself, credit to his friends, and profit to the world. Matthew Henry was closely watched by his parents, in order to discover his fitness for the work. He at length made known his feelings; when his cautious father gently encouraged him, and suggested the importance of well considering the subject.

In order to improve him in general knowledge, and to give him the benefit of a change, at the age of eighteen he was sent to London by his father to be under the tuition of the Rev. Thomas Doolittle, M.A.,—a name of singular sound, and, if names originally indicated character, might perhaps have been given to one of this good man's ancestors, because he was very idle and good for nothing; but, at all events, *his* character did not corre-

spond with his name; for, Matthew writing home to one of his sisters immediately after his arrival, says, that "in his meeting-place there are several galleries, it is all pewed; and a brave pulpit a great height above the people;" and in the same letter he adds, "I perceive that Mr. Doolittle is very studious and diligent, and that Mrs. Doolittle and her daughter are very fine and gallant."

Philip Henry knew by experience the great advantages of college-training; he had observed at Oxford, what all who have passed through a similar curriculum observe, that a man at college soon finds his level and loses intellectual conceit; that there is a stimulus to exertion in being surrounded by men equal or superior to yourself; that narrow views are obviated by collision with men who think for themselves; that classical and other pursuits are carried on in a more thorough manner when you have to prove your acquirements by compositions, exercises, and examinations compared with and known by

others, and that habits of thoroughness and correct literary tastes are formed for subsequent life. But at that time, when Nonconformists were persecuted so bitterly, and when special danger would attend a young man's piety, he wisely determined not to send Matthew to Oxford, but allowed him, after leaving Mr. Doolittle, to pursue his studies at Gray's Inn, London, where many have laid the foundation of their legal greatness. Although Matthew pursued his studies with diligence and care, it appears that he never seriously thought of the law as a profession. His heart's desire was to preach the Gospel. However, by studying there he had opportunities of forming acquaintance with men of some consideration, of hearing the most eminent Episcopalian and Nonconformist divines, and of variously filling up his time with profit until he could see his way clear to the Christian ministry. The influence of his legal studies is seen in many parts of his writings. Very often there will be found in his

Commentary, Latin and English quotations which do not come in the usual course of classical or theological reading, and there is often a use of terms which only a lawyer would think of employing.

During his residence in London, it was his privilege to pay a visit to his father's dear friend and former intimate acquaintance, Richard Baxter, who was then imprisoned for preaching the Gospel contrary to the Five Mile Act, and tried before that infamous man, Judge Jeffreys. It is not known whether Matthew Henry was present to witness the insults heaped upon Baxter at the trial, by that defiler of the British Bench; but in a letter to his father he says that he stayed in prison with him an hour, and that Mr. B—— gave some good counsel to prepare for trials, and that the best preparation for them was a life of faith, and a constant course of self-denial. Doubtless, that hour spent in such a place, and with such a man, had the effect of strengthening the convictions which in

subsequent years were maintained so firmly, and expressed so kindly.

We now come to the period which determined his settlement in Chester. During the time that he stayed with Mr. Doolittle, he pursued a course of reading which had a bearing on the ministry; and, even when at Gray's Inn, he cultivated a taste for general literature, acquired a knowledge of French, attended occasionally at a meeting for discussing theological subjects, and carried on a careful private study of the Scriptures. While at Broad Oak, enjoying a season of relaxation, his friend, Mr. George Illidge, of Nantwich, invited him once to preach in that town. There he preached his first sermon. The good people of Nantwich thought that they saw in his intelligence, earnestness, and power of speech, the elements of a really useful man, and they were glad to enjoy his services on two or three occasions. Just at that time he happened to pay a visit to some friend in Chester. I have not been able to

ascertain who it was. His good fame had come from Nantwich to this city, and a few friends earnestly entreated him to preach to them. As in the days of primitive Christianity, it was considered to be no sin against God, and no injury to man, to preach in a house ; so there were some in Chester then who thought a practice so time-honoured, and having such a precedent as Apostolic example, might with advantage be adopted by the young man from Broad Oak. My efforts to discover the identical place have hitherto been unavailing. Whether it is still standing in Chester, my inquiries have not enabled me to decide. Be that as it may, it is known that he preached his first sermon in the house of a Mr. Henthorne, a sugar-baker. Those who are familiar with the antiquities of the city, and the ancient companies and halls of trade that once were in existence, may perhaps know the nature of that business ; it is not a name in ordinary use among the Cestrians of the present day.

In order to understand the true position of Matthew Henry when he came to reside in Chester, and to appreciate the spirit in which he came to that decision, I must just briefly call attention to the state of Non-conformity in the city at that period. I have said that the Act of Uniformity was passed in the year 1662, the year of his birth, by which two thousand excellent men were ejected from their livings. Cheshire had its proportion of these. Among the two thousand were the incumbents or vicars of

Acton.	Gosworth.
Ashton.	Hargrave.
Astbury.	Macclesfield.
Backford.	Malpas.
Barthomly.	Marbury.
Budworth.	Marple.
Burton.	Mobberley.
Chelford.	Mattsham.
Chester.	Northendon.
Church Minshull.	Norbury.
Congleton.	Pulford.
Daresbury.	Rotherston.
Doddleston.	Sandbach.
Goostrey.	Shocklock.

Stockport.	Wallasey.
Tarvin.	Waverton.
Thurstanton.	Whitby.
Thornton.	Wilmslow.
Tilston.	Whitley.
Upper Peover.	Woodchurch.
West Kirkby in Wirral.	

Those of Chester were : Thomas Harrison, D.D., of St. Werburgh's ; he afterwards laboured successfully as a Nonconformist minister at Dublin, and was the author of several works : Peter Lee, of St. John's ; he afterwards lived as a Nonconformist at Knutsford : John Glendal, of St. Peter's : William Cook, of St. Michael's ; during the siege of Chester he was in favour of the Royalist party ; he was a man admired by Bishop Walton for his great knowledge of Oriental languages, and immediately after being turned out from his living was committed to jail by the mayor for preaching in his own house ; but was soon afterwards released. All this took place in Chester in the year of Matthew Henry's birth, 1662.

The Conventicle Act of 1663, prevented re-

ligious meetings in houses, under a penalty for the *first* offence of 5*l.*, or three months' imprisonment; for the *second* offence 10*l.*, or six months' imprisonment; and for the *third*, banishment to one of the American plantations, but not to New England, lest there the offender should be cheered by the friendship of the good, liberty-loving descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers. That was in 1663. Then, in 1665, came the Five Mile Act, by which ejected ministers were not allowed, on refusing an unjust test, to come within five miles of any corporate town or borough, or where they had once resided as ministers. Mr. Cook, who was ejected from St. Michael's, therefore withdrew to Puddington, nine miles from Chester. But a Mr. Hall, who was ejected from Mear, in Staffordshire, and came to Chester for refuge, was imprisoned six months in the city jail because he did not flee five miles from the borough. But, in the course of a few years these two iniquitous acts were suspended, and Mr. Cook and Mr. Hall gathered separate con-

gregations in different parts of the city. They both died in 1684, when Matthew Henry was twenty-two years of age, and was studying in London. Persecution revived just at that time, and these two congregations, having lost their pastors, were thereby dispersed. The people were obliged to content themselves with family worship, or occasional secret meetings, at each other's houses. But there was another ejected Nonconformist minister in Chester, Mr. Harvey, from Wallasey, in this county. He gathered a congregation as soon as he dare conduct a service; his place of meeting was in Bridge Street. After the deaths of Mr. Cook and Mr. Hall, a little more liberty being granted by James II., Mr. Harvey's congregation was increased by the friends of these deceased ministers. We see, then, that in 1685, the three congregations were united into one under Mr. Harvey, and in the course of the next year, 1686, Matthew Henry was invited by a few friends to establish a new congregation and act as their pastor.

In connection with his settlement, there is a beautiful feature of his character exemplified, which is worthy of notice and imitation. He had been earnestly invited to come and form a new congregation; he knew that there was one in Chester, under the charge of a venerable man of God, who had lost his home and all for conscience sake; he saw that the acceptance of this offer would bring a young and vigorous man into competition with one whose energy was failing; he feared, lest by seeking to establish a new Nonconformist cause he might weaken one already in existence, pain a good man's heart, and appear to be intrusive, and, therefore, having consulted his father, and obtained his consent to become pastor, he resolved not to do so without consulting Mr. Harvey and having his hearty approval. That I call gentlemanly, Christian conduct; that is the deed of one who will not rashly wound the feelings of another, and indicates a heart full of sympathy and respect for venerable servants of Christ. To the honour of Mr. Harvey, be

it mentioned, he pleasantly said, "there is work enough for us both." This resulted in the acceptance of the invitation, and after three months' interval, Matthew Henry came and took up his first residence in a house in Bridge Street, above the shop now occupied by a Mr. Parry, cheesemonger.

The ordination of Matthew Henry was solemnised on the 9th of May, 1687; but there is some uncertainty respecting the place where it occurred. In those days of persecution it was often prudent, to escape the notice of the public. It was then the custom of all Nonconformists to ordain pastors, not where they were to live, but where a considerable number of ministers could most conveniently meet for the occasion. It was not so much a recognition of pastor by his people, as an approval and commendation by his brother ministers. The order was simple, just like that now practised among us. The candidate made a confession of faith; questions were asked by one of the ministers to ascertain his

intentions and motives in entering on the work of the ministry; prayer was offered on his behalf, while the hands of the brethren were placed upon his head; a solemn charge was delivered, addressed to him personally, and then a sermon was delivered by another minister, suited to the occasion. The document, certifying the reality of the ordination was signed by all who took part in it.* It reads thus :—

“We, whose names are subscribed, are well assured that Mr. Matthew Henry is an ordained Minister of the Gospel.

“*Sic Testor.* WM. WICKENS,
EDW. LAWRENCE,
FRAN. TALLENT,
NATH. VINCENT,
JAMES OWEN,
RICH. STEELE.”

* In consequence of the secrecy with which Matthew Henry's ordination was solemnised by his London friends, we are not informed whether this usual order was observed on that occasion; most probably it was, with the exception of the sermon. It is known that he then read a paper of his own in Latin on the question of Justification, whether it is by faith without the works of the law—*An justificemur fide absque operibus legis?* The certificate of ordination in this case was a very simple affair.

The ordination of a man to the sacred and responsible office of preaching the Gospel and guiding on the people of God, is at all times a service of unusual solemnity and searching of heart. And few of us who have had upon our heads the hands of a bishop or elder ministers, have prepared for, and passed through the service with more care and self-examination than Matthew Henry. The record he has left in his own hand-writing, is one of the most testing and devout documents ever penned by a young man. He counted the cost, he tried his motives, he examined his conduct and made a sacred covenant with his God, by His grace, to be faithful to the end of life. He says, "I resolve by His grace to lay myself out for the spiritual good of those over whom God shall set me." "I will by the grace of God suffer cheerfully and courageously for the truths and ways of Christ—choosing rather with Moses to suffer afflictions with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." "This is the substance of what I promise in

the strength of the spirit, in the grace of Christ, and having *sworn by His strength, I will perform it*, that I will keep His righteous judgments, and the Lord keep it always in the imagination of the thoughts of my heart, and establish my way before Him." The stability of rocks lies in their substantial composition and their deep foundation ; the oak braves the boisterous storm, because its roots are deep in the earth, permeated with moisture ; and here, in this self-examination and solemn self-consecration, we discern the solid character of Matthew Henry's profession, which made him firm when persecution arose and beat fiercely, and here we see the original source of the spiritual vigour which enabled him amidst great trials to extend his influence and preserve a fair reputation. A strong inner life is the invariable condition of a durable and useful profession.

In the spirit of earnestness and sincerity with which he entered upon his work in the same spirit did he perform it. Now com-

menced the ceaseless toil, the diligent study, the pastoral anxiety, the prayerful seasons, the clear, affectionate, judicious exposition of scripture, which won the affection of hundreds, silenced the cavils of persecutors, comforted the hearts of the sorrowful, edified the attentive learner, made homes happy, gathered large congregations, and sent forth to the world the volumes which have rendered his life a blessing to succeeding generations. His labours extended beyond his own usual congregation. For twenty years he was wont to cheer the wretched hearts of prisoners in the jail, by pointing them to the sinner's Friend. The villages of Mouldsworth, Grange, Bromborough, Elton, and Saughton, received from him a monthly lecture. Either Beeston, Mickledale, Peckforton, Walsham, Stockbridge, Buerton, or Darnal enjoyed his sermons once a week. Although facilities for travelling were then inferior to ours, his great expository ability becoming known and appreciated by ministers and churches, he often

extended his journeys to Whitchurch, Wrenbury Wood, Wem, Boreaton, Prescot, and Shrewsbury. Annually he made it a point to preach at Nantwich, Newcastle, and Stone, and at last was urgently invited to preach as often as he could, and he complied with the request, at Manchester, Stockport, Bolton, Warrington, Liverpool, and other places in Lancashire. He was a member of the Cheshire Union of ministers, and twice a year met with his brethren for purposes of consultation and prayer—alternately at Knutsford and Bucklow Hill. In the early part of his ministerial life, he declined taking part in ordinations, feeling that brethren more advanced in years were more worthy of such honour; but he was obliged at last to listen to the importunity of his friends in the county. Not a few persons were set apart to the work of the ministry with his sanction, and by his hands and prayers. In the early part of his public life, he made a resolution never to decline an invitation to

preach if he could possibly avoid it; so much impressed was he with the importance of working while reason and strength continued.

It was natural to suppose that constant activity and faithful preaching would make a small place of meeting too contracted for his exertions. Hence, we find, that his congregation, desiring to leave Whitefriars, laid the foundation of a new chapel in Crook Street, in September, 1699, which was completed at a cost of 532*l.* 16*s.* 1*d.*, and opened on the 8th of April, 1700. On that occasion, Mr. Henry preached a sermon on the text, "The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know, if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the Lord, that we have built us an altar"—a sermon most appropriate to the times, when some men considered diversity of opinion the sure sign of a rebellious spirit, and suited to the man who could openly avow and exercise his preferences

without fostering a factious spirit, or cherishing a feeling of ill-will toward those who differed from him. Not long after the opening of this chapel, the venerable minister of the other Nonconformist congregation departed to his eternal home; and his son, the Rev. Jonathan Harvey, became his successor. For some reason or other this congregation now began to decline, and many of them successively went to hear Mr. Henry. This rendered his position one of great delicacy and difficulty. It is not a very pleasing thing for a minister to see his own congregation increased at the expense of a fellow-labourer's; and no prudent, considerate pastor, would encourage among his own people a roving disposition, much less induce, in the slightest degree, any one to forsake his proper place of worship, to become one of his own hearers. It is a breach of ministerial etiquette, as well as a violation of the bond of brotherhood, for any one to pay special attention to persons belonging to an-

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other congregation, with the design of gaining an unconscious influence over them, by which they may be led to attach themselves to his ministry. Such church-robbing, like all other robberies, is dishonest and very undesirable. May it never become prevalent. We want, and should only desire, to bring in the wanderer, the outcast, not the sheep of another fold. Matthew Henry's allusion to the subject is beautifully characteristic of the man:—"I have had many searchings of heart about Mr. Harvey's congregation, who came dropping in to us. As I have endeavoured in that matter to approve myself to God and my own conscience, and my heart doth not reproach me, so, blessed be God, I hear not of any person, one or other, that doth."

But a change soon transpired, which removed this anxiety. For sundry reasons, Mr. Harvey saw it to be his duty to resign his charge; and for the remnants of his congregation there was, on April 1, 1707, erected in Crook Street Chapel a new gallery, at the

cost of 85*l.* 0*s.* 5*d.* The state of things there at this period may be gathered from the statement, that the communicants numbered 350, and that harmony and comfort abounded. An honourable reward given by the Great Head of the Church to his earnest and faithful servant! The desert had blossomed as the rose; thorns and briars had given way to the myrtle and olive tree. The warmth of Christian affection, and the intelligence of well-taught Bereans, were the characteristics of that people.

I have said before, that intelligence in those days travelled rather slowly; consequently, the reputation of a man, when acknowledged far from home, must have been well tried and fairly earned. The fame of Matthew Henry in Cheshire and Lancashire became known to many of the leading Nonconformist ministers and laymen of London. For some reason, not specified, he visited London in 1698, and again in 1704, on which occasion he preached almost every day, and was much sought after by all

classes of society. In 1699 the learned and eloquent Dr. Bates, pastor of the Nonconformist church at Hackney, rested from his labours, and soon after this event an invitation was sent to Mr. Henry to become his successor, which he declined. Here I may observe, that in our Nonconformist churches, ministers are not appointed by any one person, nor by any body of men. Each congregation invites the person from whom they think they shall derive most profit, and he has not to ask any man, or any body of men, but simply consults himself and God, as to whether he shall accept or decline the invitation. Not long after this Hackney invitation, he was invited to Salter's Hill, London; and to give effect to the request, persuasive letters were sent from John Howe, Dr. Williams, and Dr. Hamilton. This he also declined. The next was from Manchester. To the deputation that waited upon him, he replied, "I cannot think of leaving Chester, till Chester leaves me." Then came one from the congregation at the

Old Jewry, London : his reason for not accepting this was, "because he loved the people of Chester too well to leave them." Again, in 1708, he was visited with a request to become pastor of the church in London, over which the celebrated John Howe only a few years before this date, had been settled. This also was in vain. Alluding to this subject, we find from one of his London friends a letter containing the following sentence: "The whole city, from Westminster to Wapping, seems heartily to wish and long for your coming." In the distress which these repeated invitations caused him, he wrote to Dr. Edmund Calamy, author of the valuable "Nonconformist Memorials." Dr. Calamy, in his very judicious and sensible letter, certainly argued in favour of London. But so strong was Mr. Henry's attachment to the old city and its people, and so fearful was he of doing them an injury that, in spite of the Doctor's reasoning, he resolved to stay where he was. But a higher Will had ordered otherwise. Never was man so assailed

by entreaties to leave a place as was Matthew Henry to leave Chester. Scarcely had he quieted his soul, after refusing the call to succeed John Howe, when the congregation at Hackney again besought him to preach for them, if only for a few Sabbaths. After gratifying their wishes thus far, they sent two persons to Chester, Mr. Gunston and Mr. Smith, as a deputation, to urge Mr. Henry to become the pastor of the church at Hackney. He speaks of the grief, care, and concern which this caused him. He says, "I did with the utmost impartiality beg of God to incline my heart that way which would be most for His glory, and I trust that I have a good conscience willing to be found in the way of duty." He then most carefully wrote down the reasons for going to London, so that he might in time to come "reflect upon them," and comfort himself that he "did nothing rashly." On the whole, he thought that these numerous invitations to a wider sphere, together with the facilities for publishing his

works, and the opinions of his brother ministers—pointed out his duty to leave the people whom he so greatly loved. It was a time of great anxiety. His affection for Chester was strong. Here he began his ministry; here he had experienced the sweetest social joys, and felt the deep sorrows of affliction and bereavement; here his first wife lay interred; here he had been the means of raising a strong Non-conformist church in times of persecution and trouble; here he had, by his gentleness and firmness, stopped the fountains of bitterness and party spirit; here he had spent the vigour of his days; here, for twenty-five years, he had preached, prayed, watched, and wept, and here the Divine Redeemer whom he honoured, had caused the joys of religion to abound in his heart. After all this, was he, the kind, warm-hearted pastor to break loose from the power of those holy associations? Was he to crush the strongest emotions of his heart and follow the guidance of cold-handed reason? No wonder that we find him saying, "I have upon

my knees in secret acknowledged to the Lord that I am in distress—in a great strait. I cannot get clear from Chester, or if I could, I cannot persuade *myself*, cheerfully to go. I cannot get clear from Hackney, and, if I could, I cannot persuade *uxorem meam* cheerfully to stay.” On the Sabbath before his removal he writes, “A very sad day. O that by the sadness of their countenances and mine, our hearts may be made better. I expounded the last chapter of Joshua and Matthew, and preached from 1 Thess. iv. 18, ‘Comfort one another.’ I see I have been unkind to the congregation who have loved me too well.” When he reached his new abode, he vented his grief thus: “Lord am I in my way? I look *back* with *sorrow* for leaving Chester; I look *forward* with *fear*; but unto *Thee* I look *up*.” Honoured man, of tender heart, strong attachments, and Christ-like devotedness! We feel even now for thy distress, and desire to share in the nobleness of thy nature, which pays regard to the feelings and welfare of others,

and in the simplicity of thy confidence which in seasons of sorrow looks upward to God !

In the year 1712 he commenced his labours in London. His former habits of study and preaching were maintained to the full extent of physical and mental ability. Testimony is borne to the zeal with which he fulfilled his pastoral engagements and watched over the young. Scarcely a day passed without some public service. Before leaving Chester he made a promise to his friends that he would spend a few Sabbaths with them every year. On these occasions he used to preach at Nantwich, Whitechurch, and other places in and near the county. On Monday, 31st May, 1714, he set out from London on one of these visits, never to return. He then preached at Wrexham, Knutsford, and Chowbent. And at Chester, where he spent twenty-five years of his public life, it was his privilege to spend his last Sabbath upon earth. He preached on the Heavenly Rest,—a theme quite in keeping with what was to happen. When he

left Chester on his way back to London, some of his friends thought that he was not well, and that they should never see him again. At Duddon he took a glass of mineral water, and before he reached Tarporley was thrown from his horse. Being engaged to preach at Nantwich he pressed on, notwithstanding the fall. His last text was, Jer. xxxi. 18, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus—Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned." During the service he was not well. Sir Thomas Delves and his lady had desired him to stay at their house at Doddington. After leaving the chapel he proceeded on his way thither accompanied by the steward. They had not gone far when he became very ill, and was taken to the Rev. Joseph Mottershead's, who kindly provided a bed and attendance. He said to his friends, who, with mournful hearts, had gathered around him, "Pray for me, now I cannot pray for myself."

He then spoke of the excellency of spiritual comforts in a time of need, and thanked God for the enjoyment of them. The next morning at five o'clock, just as the rising sun was calling the labourer to his daily toil, a summons came to this servant of Christ calling him to rest, for his work was done. He was speechless for three hours, and then, with fixed eyes, he fell asleep.

In vain the fancy strives to paint
The moment after death ;
The glories that surround the saint,
When he resigns his breath.

Thus much, and this is all we know,
They are supremely blest ;
Have done with sin, and care and woe,
And with their Saviour rest.

As Chester was the scene of his chief toil, so Chester is the place where his body lies till it is quickened and changed to an immortal form. The funeral took place on Friday, 25th June. When the procession reached the city, it was met by eight of the

clergy, ten coaches, and a large company of horsemen; and respect was shown by all parties, as his remains were being deposited, near to those of his first wife, in Trinity Church. "He rests from his labours, and his works do follow him."

CHAPTER IV.

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DESCRIPTIVE.

I NOW ask attention to some particular features of Matthew Henry's character, which give him great prominence among the servants of God; which show that he was a most worthy parent, friend, pastor, and citizen, and which will partly account for the reputation he has gained among all classes of the community.

There have been men on the earth who have performed great deeds for their fellow-men, and have, in the estimation of some, laid the foundation of subsequent political freedom and national prosperity; but the moral character of such persons has, in some in-

stances, been written at least with ambiguous lines; and the purity and strict justice of their exploits have been obscured by the turmoil of party feeling, and the conflicting elements of opposing interests, amidst which they were accomplished. In such instances it is needful that the Advocate, the Historian, or the Lecturer should take pains to distinguish between what was really done, and what men have *said* or thought was done; between the *true* motives of action, and the motives which are imputed by others, and between the character as viewed amidst the confusion of contending parties, and as viewed after the lapse of years, when feeling has subsided, and the words and weapons of warfare are gone. And even then, when this has been done, Prejudice will put on her veil, so that the brightness of a good life shall look dim, and the beauty of a consistent character appear imperfect. Aversion will exercise her secret power over Reason, so that it shall not discover by hard thinking the traces of true

greatness, which Love and Esteem would perceive in a moment. There is no age of the world made up of all perfect men, nor of men who are all free from the littleness of a weak intellect imperfectly trained, and the deep-seated bigotry which prefers the Shibboleth of a party to the general welfare of a people, and which glories in the sully of a fair reputation for the gratification of malice or the pleasure of a momentary triumph. It is, therefore, in perfect accordance with a sound estimate of human nature, and a correct view of social life, if in the days of Henry there were here and there a few individuals who, envious of his fame, uttered words of disparagement, which revealed their own weakness rather than his deficiencies; or perpetrated little deeds of annoyance, which, instead of detracting from his dignity of character, only served as a foil to show off more strikingly the sweetness of his temper, and the benevolent tendency of his entire conduct. Although the brightest sun, while dispens-

ing cheering influence, is sometimes obscured to the eye of a few of this world's inhabitants, by the fogs and clouds incident to a changeful atmosphere, they diminish not his real glory, they touch not the source of his influence, they produce only a local, limited effect, and they are of brief duration ; and, as certainly as that the world exists, he will be an object of interest, and a source of cheerfulness, when they have long since passed away. So we may truly affirm of Matthew Henry, that the unpleasant, light-obscuring effects arising from a few imperfect, contracted forms of humanity, which here and there appeared in his day, have in course of time passed away, and left an honoured character uninjured by their existence. No barrister's acuteness and tact are required to set him free from the charge of dishonesty, duplicity, or political heresy. The shrewd casuist finds here no occasion for the exercise of his peculiar power of distinguishing between things lawful and things expedient, deeds individually right but gene-

rally wrong, words morally true but politically false ; nor do we need the withering power of a polished irony, or the declamations of an elaborate rhetoric to rid the literary world of the detractors of his fame.

Hence the course is clear, and men are unanimous in declaring that he attained to real greatness. In what, then, consists his greatness ? What in his spirit, deeds, mental constitution, or printed works, appeals to our feelings of admiration and respect ? By what reasoning process have the past and present generations invested his name with a charm for the pulpit, the family, and private life ? To what singular and unexampled exploit can we point as the cause of his present position among the honoured men of a past age ? He is not distinguished among men because of surpassing intellectual powers, by which he has stamped the impress of his mind upon subsequent ages. Shakspeare, Bacon, Locke, and Newton, excel him here. It is not because of having transmitted to posterity sub-

stantial volumes of profound theological learning. Taylor, Baxter, Owen, and others have done that. It is not because he has silenced the cavils of scepticism, by showing the harmony existing between Christianity and the course of nature, in a series of arguments absolutely unanswerable—that honour belongs to Bishop Butler: nor because he filled a high ecclesiastical position with credit to himself and advantage to his country—to such dignity he never aspired.

RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS AND CHRIST-LIKE
SPIRIT.

One of the chief reasons of Matthew Henry's distinction *may be found in the Christ-like spirit with which he held and carried out his religious convictions.*

When we speak of his religious convictions, we do not refer so much to his doctrinal views as to his ecclesiastical preferences. There was no disagreement between his views of the great leading truths of religion and those of

the orthodox Episcopalians ; nor is there any difference in this respect between Episcopalians and Nonconformists of the present day. It was the custom in those days, and is now, with the Nonconformist churches, for the candidate, at his ordination, to read his own written statement of the doctrinal truths he maintained and intended to preach. This was done, because it satisfied the ordaining pastors of the orthodoxy of the person, and gave evidence also of his power of clear thinking and correct expression. Matthew Henry was one of those—and may their number ever increase—who, like Abraham, believe the Word of God when they cannot explain it. He first satisfied himself that the Bible is the Word of God—that what is there stated came from the Divine Being Himself. Having settled this, he was prepared to expect that the communications of an Infinite Being, respecting His own nature, the mode of governing the world, and a plan of Redemption, which is from everlasting to everlasting, and is related to

the entire universe, might, in some instances, be beyond the power of a finite mind to understand ; and therefore he accepted the facts and truths recorded, just as a child accepts the statements of a wise father,—not because he can explain or comprehend all,—but because his FATHER HAS SAID IT. This feeling of profound reverence for, and submission to, all that God has been pleased to make known, shows itself in every page of his “ Commentary,” in every sermon he published, and was the guiding feeling when, for his ordination, he wrote and read as follows :—

“ I believe that in the unity of the Godhead there is a Trinity of Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and that these three are but one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. This is a *revealed mystery* which I do believe, but cannot comprehend.”

Of Jesus Christ we read,—“ That he lived a holy sinless life, being made under the law ; that he underwent the miseries of this life, the wrath of God for our sins, and, as a sacrifice,

died a cursed death upon the Cross, thereby satisfying Divine Justice for the sins of man, and so reconciling unto God and bringing in an everlasting Righteousness."

Therefore it is that he did not differ from others in orthodox doctrine. He differed from many in matters of Church government. He was a Dissenter—a Nonconformist. I have stated that his father was a Nonconformist, because he and two thousand others would not, as required by the Act of Uniformity, solemnly declare that "it was not lawful upon *any pretence whatever* to take arms against the King;" that there was no obligation upon them to "endeavour any change or alteration of government either in Church or State," and that they gave assent and consent to each and everything required or expressed in the Book of Common Prayer. By the same Act it had been required that re-ordination by the hands and prayers of an Episcopal Bishop must be obtained, or else a *right* to preach the Gospel could not be secured.

Although Matthew Henry was not ejected, because never in the Established Church, yet he entertained the same views as his father. Efforts were used in those times to induce a few of the eminent Nonconformists to renounce their scruples of conscience and receive ordination at the hands of a Bishop. Dr. Fog, the worthy Dean of Chester, had tried Mr. Tong, but with no success. If he did not, some one else, in or near Chester, endeavoured to set before Matthew Henry the importance of being ordained in the Episcopal form by Dr. Cartwright, then Bishop of the diocese.

Instead of manifesting any rancour of spirit, and neither treating the proposal with the disdain of a sectary, nor accepting it with the eagerness of one whose principles are loose, he, like a Christian gentleman, expressed, in proper terms, his sense of obligation to the advocate of Episcopacy for the kind consideration shown towards himself; and, as one who valued truth, and felt the responsibility attached to the possession of rational

powers, he promised to review the subject in the light of the New Testament, and then declare his decision. He did so, and wrote down the reasons *pro* and *con*. He was so conscientious, that in making assent and consent *ex animo*, to all that was required or expressed in the Book of Common Prayer, he could make no mental reservation, nor assign a "private interpretation." His nature and education were of that kind, that he must strictly carry out every particular thing, which in the sight of God and man, he professed to adopt. From various parts of his writings, we are justified in saying that his reasoning was as follows:—Ordination by elder ministers is at least as much, and probably more, in accordance with the New Testament than by an Episcopal Bishop. God by making many persons so ordained very useful to His church, had shown that they were as acceptable to Him as others. It is a dangerous doctrine for one party to claim exclusive right to preach the Gospel. There

is much in some of the statements of the Book of Common Prayer that is at all events ambiguous, and, by many, variously and in opposite senses, explained. It cannot be right in such an important matter to give one's own unexpressed private interpretation to what is of doubtful meaning. The Apostles formed a class *sui generis*, gifted with inspiration and power of working miracles, and therefore not transmitting their authority to any one who does not possess the same supernatural endowments. In the New Testament there is allusion only to two orders of officers, one *spiritual*, described by various names, "minister," "pastor," "bishop" or "overseer," according to his work of "serving," "feeding," or "watching over" the particular people of his charge; the other, *secular*, called, "deacons." In the New Testament, the appellation "priest," is never exclusively applied to an officer or order in the church: but is applied to all those true Christians who form the "peculiar

people" and the "royal priesthood." As the patronage and sanction of rulers and the wealthy before the days of Henry VIII., was no proof that the Church of Rome, which they supported, was in perfect accordance with Scripture, so also the transfer of that support to the Protestant Episcopal party, did not prove its divine authority. And, finally, he could by the blessing of God, be equally useful in preaching the Gospel out of the Establishment. Reasoning in this manner, he, as the result, calmly came to the conclusion, that his duty was not to conform to the requirements of the Establishment, but to rank himself in company with his father among the Nonconformists.

I know that there were then, and are now, many good and learned men, who entirely differ from Matthew Henry in their views and reasonings upon this subject; and all honour to their judgment; yet, I am sure, that they allow it to have been a noble deed of Philip Henry's when he sacrificed home and

friends, endured persecution and imprisonment, in order to act according to his carefully formed, conscientious convictions. Although Matthew Henry can scarcely be placed in the same category as his father, since he was not an ejected minister, nor had suffered imprisonment for conscience sake, it should nevertheless be borne in mind that he was placed in circumstances which tested quite as severely the strength of his principles. He might, had he conformed, have risen to eminence in certain places. His father had been the playmate of Charles II. Some of his connections had influence at Court. He was regarded favourably by some able Episcopalians, and was flattered by their solicitations to lay aside his Nonconformist scruples. Even then he was known as a young man of more than average abilities, gentlemanly bearing, lively imagination, and ready utterance. If he followed his father, contempt and persecution awaited him, from some who otherwise would promote his tem-

poral advancement, while the Nonconforming party was weak, and often spoken of as hostile to the best interests of the country.

Knowing as we do these facts, and knowing also the imperfection of human nature, the alluring power of worldly position, the easy road to a change of opinion, when wealth, friends, or earthly honours are at stake, and the numerous instances in which young men have, without any careful study and prayer, left the convictions and practices of their parents to believe and act according to the customs of the affluent and powerful,—do we not see, I say (whatever may be our views of the theory of Church government)—in Matthew Henry's adherence to his convictions under these circumstances—the regard for principle, the moral courage, the self-possession, the unbiassed judgment, and the enlightened determination, which ever constitute the elements of true nobility? Again, I repeat, although there are many who differ from him on matters of Church polity, and

are as sincere in their convictions as was he, there is not one, I should imagine, who delights in deeds of moral heroism, but that will admire the intelligence, the carefulness, the candour, the self-denial, the calm, dignified spirit, manifest in this avowal and defence of his religious convictions.

If some of the Puritans (and we know that a few did) in days of persecution resented injuries, by the use of harsh, violent language, he held their opinions, but partook not of their spirit. The acrimony and intolerance in Dr. Sacheverel's publication against the Nonconformists, when read by Matthew Henry, awakened no malice and hatred in his heart, except hatred against bitterness of speech and spirit. He had learned to "speak the truth in love." His pulpit was never desecrated by noisy, hollow ravings against established authorities; but was devoted exclusively to preaching Christ crucified. It is true, his biographers tell us, that there were a few who desired the unholy gratification of injuring his Non-

conformist usefulness by slanderous imputations on his moral character. Instead of holding a controversy with such persons he sought more than ever to hold forth the testimony of a quiet, consistent life. When an Alderman of Chester railed on him bitterly, and three times swore by his Maker, "That if the Queen would give him leave he would cut his throat, and the throats of his congregation;" he simply replied, "The Lord forgive him." While he practised his Nonconformity, he insisted on peace and goodwill toward all men. His frequent advice to others was, "Delight in the holy generosity of speaking well of those who differ from you." In his sermon on "Disputation" he lays down the excellent rule thus: "In matters of doubtful disputation, while we are contending for that which we take to be right, let us at the same think it possible that we may be in the wrong." "Our Master will be displeased with us if it be found that we have been hot and fierce in our disputes, and have mingled

our passions and peevish resentments with them; if a point of honour has governed us more than a point of conscience, and if we have contended more for victory and reputation than for truth and duty."

There is one peculiarity in the conduct of Matthew Henry (yet, indeed, it was adopted by others of that age) which shows the admirable manner in which he could be firm and unyielding, and at the same time unpretending and quiet. I refer to his practice of appending to his name the words "Minister of the Gospel," or else the initials V.D.M. Now, these words, or these initials, were intended to express far more than what is meant by the modern term "Reverend." When Matthew Henry was a young man, it was not every preacher of the Gospel that was recognised to be such. In both high and low positions, in the State or the Established Church, men were wont to denounce all preachers who did not conform to the requirements of the Act of Uniformity as unauthorised teachers, self-

made guides, sectaries, schismatics, and obstinate bigots. What though in the presence of Jehovah, venerable men with solemn prayers and imposed hands commended the pastor to the God of all grace, and declared him to be worthy of the confidence of the Christian Church; what though he toiled day and night, read, prayed, watched, wept, and preached with the fervour of a "dying man to dying men;" what though guilty sinners in great numbers found peace through the blood of the Saviour, and blessed the land by the influence of their holiness,—it was all as nothing! His ministerial life was ignored; he was despised as a foolish fanatic; he was subjected to civil disabilities; he was counted as a bane and a bore; and men were considered to be acting imprudently, if not illegally, in listening to the voice of such a guide. To all this Matthew Henry could not consent. Against this doctrine he must bear his protest. He was a peaceable man, but not on that account the less intelligent in his convictions. He was a

man, and respected his own judgment. He called no creature "Master." Although to revile and retaliate was not in his disposition, his principles were nevertheless very dear to him; they were not founded on caprice, nor to be disowned to escape a frown or a prison. Of one thing he was certain: that Christ was precious to his own soul, and that he, by the blessing of God, was the means of promoting the eternal welfare of others; and therefore, when men denounced him as an unauthorised preacher and not a minister of the Gospel, he calmly expressed his own conviction that he *was*, by appending to his name "Minister of the Gospel." Posterity will doubtless confirm his judgment, while it admires the blended firmness and meekness with which it was expressed; and it is to be hoped that posterity will also learn to test the validity of a man's ministry by the results of his labours, and not merely by his patronage and profession. What good has he done? What wandering, unhappy sinners has he led to the Cross?

What congregations has he gathered? How many distressed spirits has he cheered and strengthened by his declarations? To what extent has he contributed to the final ingathering of the redeemed? Let it never be true of us that whom God deigns to bless, we, Balaam-like, inwardly curse. Let us not despise whom Christ accepts, nor brand as miserable heretics and schismatics whom He stamps with His image. God forbid that we should ever set up a scheme or theory, which may be imperfect, to circumscribe the operations of Divine grace, or modify His methods by our own conceptions. "By their fruits ye shall know them." "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles." "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets."

Here I would wish to point out one instance of Matthew Henry's catholicity of spirit, co-existing with such a strong attachment to his own opinions. He was accustomed to say, "I hate to see religion and the Church monopolised, as if Christ took His

measures from our own little fancies." An opportunity occurred in Chester for the exemplification of this catholic feeling. One of the evils of civil war and political faction is, that by withdrawing the attention of men from religion and the quiet enjoyments of home, and by feeding the fires of hate, they cause a people to degenerate in their morals and to find unusual pleasure in habits abominably vicious. In the year 1698 there were in Chester two estimable dignitaries of the Established Church,—Dr. Stratford, the Lord Bishop, and Dr. Fog, the Dean. These two eminent men, in order to check the prevailing vices of the city, opened a series of week-day services in St. Peter's church. Mr. Henry was in the habit of attending them, that by so doing he might be spiritually benefited, and show his sympathy with such aggressive efforts on the kingdom of darkness. The salvation of men was more important to him than petty differences of opinion. His heart was greatly cheered by the sermons to which he

listened. Unfortunately, many of the clergy in and around Chester derided the Bishop and Dean for their departing from the regular order of the Church Service, and they devised various means of putting them down. The opposition became so strong that the Dean, in the year 1700, proposed that Mr. Henry and his brethren should carry on a similar course of services, hoping thereby to overcome more easily the difficulties put in their way by men who saw the people living in impenitence, but would neither preach effectively themselves, nor give encouragement to others who in the fulness of their hearts sought to do so. Thus, to the honour of the worthy Bishop, the Dean, and Matthew Henry, an alliance for preaching the Gospel of Christ in the face of clerical opposition was formed, which perhaps in the last day will be seen to have been the means of blessing many.

Yet let me not be misunderstood; while stating his readiness to subordinate his own peculiar views to the important work of evan-

gelising the city of his adoption, he was by no means indifferent to the necessity of upholding the great doctrines of the Gospel without the slightest compromise. There is such a thing as ruinous latitudinarianism, which tends to undermine the foundations of evangelical religion. Matthew Henry was no friend to that. While he abhorred censoriousness, bitterness and strife, he loved the doctrines of the Cross, and was ever earnest, clear, and decided in their defence and exhibition. No uncertain sound came from his lips. No mysticism, no neology, no discoursing *about* the Cross, characterised his productions. He did not philosophise about Redemption until Christ was not seen by the anxious sinner who longed for pardon, nor did he hold it to be a matter of indifference as to whether evangelical sentiments were entertained or not. Speaking of a person who came to see him, he says, "He adheres to the Arian heresy: I had a deal of talk with him." "The Lord keep me in the way of truth," again he says,

"pride is the cause of heresy. It was a pleasure to Socinus that he had no master: we wish it had been his fate to have had no scholars!"

I have adduced these instances of his continued firmness and Christian gentleness, that we may see in him how strong religious convictions may be held and made practical, and at the same time a kind, generous spirit toward others expressed.

In this respect we shall not be far from the truth, if we say that he was liberal without being latitudinarian; bold, yet free from bigotry; candid, though not cruel; tender-hearted, yet not weak; civil, not censorious; courteous, not fawning; sensible of the fallibility of his own mind, trusting to no other; unflinching in his adherence to principle, ready to co-operate in good works; strongly bound to his suffering Nonconformist brethren, loving dearly every holy Episcopalian; a vigorous opponent of heresy, gentle towards those who were enslaved by it; respectful

towards the opinions of the learned—having chief confidence of his own ; careful and mild in his statements, strong in his convictions ; a decided enemy to exclusive priestly authority, an ardent lover of order and propriety ; possessed of profound contempt for mere tradition and the customs of the world,—like a child whenever he approached the Word of God.

GREAT INFLUENCE IN TROUBLOUS TIMES.

Matthew Henry also exerted great influence for good in a season of considerable difficulty and moral degeneracy.

I wish no one to be afraid of the term “moral degeneracy,” as though I were about to impute to persons of that period what ought not to be applied to them ; nor is it to be inferred that all the goodness of the times was to be found among the Nonconformists. There had been men in the Established Church at Chester who would be an honour and an ornament to any place and any age. The learned and amiable Dr. Wilkins, and the

equally pious and able Dr. Pearson, author of the "Exposition of the Apostles' Creed," had graced the Bishopric of Chester with their excellences, and had thrown the weight of their eloquence and learning on the side of evangelical religion. Nevertheless, on good authority, we learn that iniquity abounded. I just now briefly alluded to the civil wars and their effect upon the habits of the people. The country generally, and especially the walled cities, had passed through a series of trials and evils which greatly interfered with the moral and spiritual prosperity of the people. Warlike feelings are always pernicious in their influence upon the heart; especially is this true when they are cherished towards men of the same nation and language, —towards neighbours and former friends. England had been the scene of internal political and religious conflict for half a century. Those who are familiar with the political history of Chester know, that its inhabitants have ever been distinguished for the strength

and determination of their political feelings. Credible authorities inform us that here faction was set against faction. Deeds of violence, words of blasphemy, cursing by lip and desire, lying and rage, and every evil engendered by strife were then called forth. The court of Charles II. was anything but a model of good morals to the nation. Political leaders had been incessantly aspiring to power, or devising mischief against their oppressors. The "Book of Sports," by Royal command, had been read by many ministers in the parish churches, encouraging the people, especially in rural districts, to desecrate the holy day of rest by foolish games and jesting speeches. Severe enactments had been in force against holy men who preached the Gospel without 'conforming to an unjust Act of Parliament; while the influence of some of the most pious and earnest preachers was confined to the houses in which they sought refuge from persecution, or to the prisons where they patiently suffered. Piety languished. The spirit of party was rife.

Political opponents were often more anxious for the adherence of the people to their cause than for the improvement of the nation. The soil was rich for iniquity, and poor for righteousness. Difficult indeed was it, in such a season, to control the passions of men, and draw them from sin to holiness. Now, what I mean to say is this,—that it was no little thing in those times for a man who was one of the despised and persecuted, to gather a large congregation; check the current of vice; silence the cavils of enemies; bear a constant and successful protest against bigotry and bitterness; administer comfort to the persecuted; make many homes happy with the blessings of domestic piety; gain an influence in various parts of the country, and with men in every station of life; attend to the wants of the poor and afflicted; pay weekly visits to condemned criminals; hold together in peace and love a large Christian church, and send forth into the world large volumes which have proved a means of instruction and an aid to

holiness until this very day. To have done such a work, and under such difficulties, there must have been in the man the most sterling qualities—the power of intellect, force of will, warmth of heart, genuine sympathy, prudence of counsel, self-possession, dignified deportment, soundness of judgment, and uniform holiness—which ever proclaim him to be great and worthy. And yet such a work, and in such troublous times, was accomplished by Matthew Henry.

Nor would we stay here, but observe that the influence which he even then, in Chester, deservedly obtained, was in no one instance ever used for the purpose of promoting the interests of any political or religious faction, nor for his own personal aggrandisement. The love of power is always a strong passion in human nature, and frequently urges to deeds which will not bear the scrutiny of an impartial posterity. There is always a danger of making religious reputation subservient to political projects; and in consequence of our free constitutional government, Englishmen

are sometimes prone to carry their political sentiments to an undue extreme. Chester was, in Matthew Henry's days, distinguished for the fierceness with which opposing parties strove to declare, and render triumphant their favourite cause. Venerable men, now living, can remember scenes of terrible conflict during the progress of an election; and, when their grandfathers were children, the same spirit prevailed, and resulted often in broken limbs and sad heart-burnings. During and after the Commonwealth, many ministers of religion were unwillingly dragged into political contests. Indeed, the religious and political elements were so blended together, that it was exceedingly difficult for any minister to stand aloof from all parties, and to use his influence without abusing it. In consequence of the confidence which was reposed in Matthew Henry's judgment and character, he might, had he been so disposed, have contributed very considerably to the success of the Whig or Tory, who might be fortunate enough to

secure the active service of his pen or tongue. But, no; with a prudence and self-control which must always be admired, he quietly gave his vote at the election, and never wrote a line or preached a sermon to stir up his friends to any particular course of political action. His business was to preach Christ crucified, to attend to the wants of his congregation, and to show forth the power and beauty of a consistent life; and to this business he devoted himself with uniform conscientiousness.

I cannot forbear giving one very particular instance, in which he was tempted to use his influence in the formation of a new Town Council, but honourably refused. In the year 1684, the ancient charter of the city of Chester was given up and a new one granted. The object of this change was really to put the corporation in the power of the Crown, for by the new charter the Crown could, at pleasure, remove those in office, and have others appointed whose political sentiments were more in accordance with the wishes of the King. In

the year 1688, a Mr. Trinder came to Chester, to remodel the corporation according to the provisions of the new charter. "He applied himself to me," says Matthew Henry, "and told me the King thought the government of the city needed reformation, and if I would say who should be put out, and who put in their places, it should be done." Here was a fine opportunity for the exercise of power! By a dozen words he might introduce his Non-conformist friends into office, and wound the feelings of his foes. Whether this was a trap set by some secret foe to get him into trouble, or whether it was a *bonâ fide* reliance upon his judgment, I cannot decidedly affirm; at all events he displayed great caution, and a pure desire not to abuse his reputation by making it subserve political ends, when he replied to Mr. Trinder thus:—"I told him I begged his pardon, that was none of my business, nor would I in the least intermeddle with anything of that nature." A happy thing will it be for cities, if all of us, who are recognised as

ministers, can exercise a minister's influence combined with such simplicity of aim.

I will not dwell upon his untiring diligence, his conscientious attention to public duties, his continuous studies from early morn till the day was far advanced, his efforts to promote the comfort of the Church and the welfare of the young, his care to improve every moment of time, and his attention to the poor and afflicted. Let it suffice to observe that, as in the lives of other great men, so in the life of Matthew Henry, the path to honour is the path of steady, persevering toil, and that the Head of the Church confers great blessings on the earnest and sincere.

PRIVATE AND DOMESTIC VIRTUES.

Our portraiture of Matthew Henry would be very incomplete were we to pass over his *conduct and spirit, as seen in private and domestic life*. I ask, then, the reader's attention while we contemplate him in his personal character as a Christian man.

The source of some of the finest rivers lies in the quietude of mountain fastnesses, where the eye of man seldom comes. The origin of the power and usefulness of some of the greatest literary productions that have blessed the world, may be found in many hours of protracted toil in the retirement of the study. And also the secret of Matthew Henry's usefulness and the spring of his continued exertions, are to be found in the quietude and devotedness of his private life; and it is the purity and general excellence of his private life that have increased the power of his more public efforts, and given a charm to all his deeds.

To say that Matthew Henry was a pious man is to affirm much, and more than is true of multitudes; but to add that his piety was of the highest order, is to give him a place among the brightest of the bright characters that have adorned the earth. Among the many valuable biographies and memoirs that have afforded to the people of God motives to self-denying

labours, and consolation in the midst of sufferings, few have been more esteemed than those referring to the lives of Philip and Matthew Henry. If the judgment and esteem of good men in the seventeenth century, respecting Philip Henry's private character, found a correct expression, by his being called the "Heavenly Henry," no one can read with care the minute details of Matthew Henry's life, without seeing that the term was also especially appropriate to him. "As one star differeth from another star in glory;" and as in the resurrection of the just some are to "shine as the stars" with a greater lustre than others; so also among the militant saints there are grades of excellence and degrees of conformity to the perfect Lord and Master. It has been the privilege of few on the earth to approach so near to Christ in sweetness of disposition, singleness of aim, delight in benevolent labours, and enjoyment of communion with God, as Matthew Henry. The degree to which the grace of God had, in him, subdued

the sinful passions of the heart, afforded delight in religious exercises, raised the affections to things above, and clothed the spirit with humility and meekness, gives occasion for heartfelt praise to the Restorer of the soul.

The piety of Matthew Henry was intelligent. He was no wild fanatic, no brainless enthusiast, no boisterous declaimer, no mere man of feeling minus thought. In him reason was enlightened by Divine teaching, and sanctified by the influence of the Holy Spirit. His imagination was kept within the bounds of a holy propriety. In his private devotions as well as in his studies and public labours, he felt and acted as a rational being whose rationality was under the rectifying power of redeeming grace. No man's reason is perfect until, like his, it is religious; and no man's religion is sound and eminent unless, as with him, his reason is in harmony with his feelings.

In all his religious life, and especially among private friends, he displayed a cheerful spirit.

The unnaturally long face, the wrinkled brow, the pouched lips, the sunken, mournful eye, and the sanctimonious air, which some have erroneously associated with their conception of a pious man, were not to be seen in Matthew Henry. His tone of speaking always indicated a hopeful mind. "It is a pity," he said, "that in our worship we had anything else to do but to *praise*." He possessed the desirable disposition and power of looking on the bright side of everything. He sought to bring good out of evil, and derive comforts from trials. Once, when in London, after having preached upon "the joyful sound," he was stopped on his way to his house by four men, who robbed him of about ten shillings. This was no pleasant affair, yet, beyond all doubt, he derived more good from it than did the robbers; for, on reaching home, he turned it to account, by observing, how thankful he ought to be that, having travelled so much, he had never been robbed before; how great an evil is the love of money, that it will urge four

men to run a risk of losing their character, their life, and their soul for ever ; how great is the power of Satan over the minds of men ; how uncertain is the possession of earthly good ; and how important it is to set the heart more and more upon treasures in Heaven. His presence uniformly afforded pleasure in the houses of his friends. There was a loveliness in his spirit, and a gladness in his heart, which caused others to feel "how happy a thing it must be to be a Christian." Though not given to indulgence he enjoyed the blessings of Providence with thankfulness. He was a stranger to asceticism and moroseness. If sometimes he fasted and withdrew for a day from his family into the seclusion of the study, it was, that by rigid self-examination and communion with God, he might destroy some lurking tendency to sin, and come forth again with the brighter countenance of a holier and happier man. He counted it to be no sin to exercise, at proper seasons, the power of laughter which his Maker had given him ; and

though occasionally he spoke and wrote in terms of awful solemnity, it was because his benevolent spirit urged him to describe the woes of the "blackness of darkness," that his friends might be aroused to seek and secure the bright hope of heaven that gladdened his own heart. If in retirement he was accustomed to lament his sloth and coldness of heart, as he often did, his lamentations were not those of one who hangs down "his head like a bulrush," but of one who could say to his soul, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

Nor was this cheerfulness the offspring of momentary impressions. It pervaded his entire life. It was seen in the pulpit, the parlour, the abode of affliction, the prison, the street, and the study. Many doubtless desired his habitual gladness who had no taste for the holiness from which it sprang. One reason of the great power of his life over many who were not decidedly religious

men, lay in the constancy of that happy spirit which they saw and coveted. They saw not the sudden brilliant flash, and then the horrid gloom, but an ever-growing, steady light. . As a "plant of the Lord's right-hand planting," his leaf did not wither, but was ever fresh and fair, and as a "tree of righteousness," he bore fruit at all seasons.

Perhaps few men have lived whose religion has been so blended with common sense, or in other words, whose common sense has been so greatly elevated and strengthened by religion as Matthew Henry's. The soundness of his judgment was remarkable. He was not ashamed to show his religion, but never known to put it unduly forward. The indiscreet zeal of the unthinking never weakened his influence, and the language of cant was foreign to his lips. The words of excited passion, the speeches of detraction, the insinuations of malice, the poisoned sayings of envy, the bitter reproaches of ill-will, the lying utterances of slander, the vulgar de-

nunciations of bigotry, and the cursed effusions of hate, are never alluded to by any of his friends or foes as issuing from his mouth. His eye betrayed not the lurking of a miserable suspicion, the cold-heartedness of the misanthrope, the disdain and contempt of a proud spirit, nor the restlessness of an unhappy mind. When annoying circumstances arose, his friends were accustomed to the language of calmness ; to the suggestions of charity, when the deeds of enemies were criticised ; the expressions of thankfulness, when others were made useful ; the tones of pity, when persecutors were suffering, and when differences arose, the words of peace, forbearance, gentleness, and love. Those who looked stedfastly on his countenance, saw the eye of the honest man who fears no one ; of the sympathetic man who feels for many ; of the humble man who seeks not the praise of others ; of the decided man who holds to principle as to life ; of the generous man who finds pleasure in helping the needy,

and of the devout man who closely walks with his God. Deception, formality, indifference, sloth, self-indulgence, bitterness, austerity, irreligion, found a foe and a contrast in his frankness, sincerity, earnestness, activity, self-denial, kindness, geniality, and deep devotion.

And whence this excellence? From what fire was this bright light enkindled, and by what means was the flame sustained and expanded? On what soil, and near what pure stream did this fair tree stand and find its nourishment? Christian excellence is not the offspring of chance—an accident to our existence—nor the simple product of a natural constitution. How far some virtues are the result and expression of a naturally amiable temperament, apart from the grace of God, our power of analysis is unable to ascertain. There is, however, little doubt but that the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit gives greater dignity to what is naturally dignified, additional sweetness to

what is constitutionally amiable, and awakens and sustains virtues that without His aid would never have adorned the life. Matthew Henry believed most firmly, and practised most assiduously the doctrine, that grace is given in addition to grace, or that God blesses the cultivation of spiritual gifts by an increase in their variety and power. The secret of his great excellence and usefulness is to be found in the conscientiousness, earnestness, and regularity with which he performed his private devotions. His diary tells us that prayer was with him a habit of mind, always cherished, and often specially exercised. The hallowed reflections now to be found in his commentary, are in many instances, the thoughts of his private study of the Scriptures. The control of his feelings and the cultivation of his heart were the objects of special attention and care. In secret, he laboured, by self-scrutiny, by meditation, by frequent recourse to the blood of sprinkling, and by importunate prayer to become con-

formed to Christ in all things. It was at the altar of God that he trimmed and fed his lamp. At the cross of Christ he found his cheerfulness, strength, and motive to self-denial. By the streams of truth that "make glad the city of God," he sought nourishment, and maintained his unfading reputation and fruitful life. Stirring are the records he has left of the heart-searchings to which he subjected himself; beautiful are the strains of devotion which his pen has perpetuated, and hallowed are the reflections on Divine truth which have rendered his fame immortal. Honoured man!—enabled by Divine grace to approach so near to the perfect image of the Lord. The world saw thy goodness and felt thy power, but entered not with thee into the secret of thy strength and excellence. Many gathered the fruit of thy life, but knew not thy spiritual husbandry. Would that all could be induced to seek the same holy earnestness in private! Would that the generation

now living could thus lay, in the solitude of the closet the foundations of a like useful life, or obtain by frequent visits to the cross, the cheerfulness, the power, the heavenly grace, and the entire devotedness of Matthew Henry !

In the family he was wont to shed the influence he gained in the retirement of the study. At five in the morning he usually commenced his daily duties. He remained in the study till noon with the exception of an interval for breakfast and family devotion. After four in the afternoon he visited the sick of his congregation, attended to other public duties, and then returned to share in the joys of his children. "Do all you can to make your children love home," were his words of advice to others ; and the kind interest he took in the pleasures and employments of his own family, was an illustration of his meaning. That household may be called happy, where all at the close of day, bow before the throne of God, and seek His

blessing during the silence of night, and such was the happiness of his household.

Although blessed with the joys which the affection of others brings, he also experienced the deep sorrows which the interruption of the interchange of affection entails. The love and attachment of relatives is one of the most fertile sources of earthly enjoyment; and so mysteriously are sorrow and joy connected, that the more full and perfect the pleasure arising from the love of our friends, the more overwhelming is our sorrow and the more agonising our distress, when they are called away. Once was Matthew Henry's heart made to feel sad and desolate by following to her resting-place the first sharer of his domestic joys. Two of his sisters claimed the funeral tear over their grave. Three of his ten children were buried from his sight, and in his presence, at Broad Oak, his honoured father breathed his last. But he knew the source of consolation too well to despair, and had too great faith in the loving

kindness of his Heavenly Father to murmur. The calm submission of his spirit under trials contributed as much, in times of distress, to the comfort of his family, as the geniality and playfulness of his disposition in times of prosperity.

GENERAL USEFULNESS TO SUCCEEDING
GENERATIONS.

I feel that this Essay on the "Life and Times of Matthew Henry" would be very deficient were we not to notice the great work he has done for succeeding generations wherever the English language is known, and indirectly, wherever the power of Christianity is felt. A truly great man often does more after his death than before it. His works follow him. His power for good is acting when he himself is in another invisible sphere. This is very true of Matthew Henry. Mankind are not always accustomed to recognise the great power which one man by the silent influence of his general character may exert on suc-

ceeding generations ; nor is the measure of his usefulness in this respect to be determined by the words used in making it known. It is one of those quiet but most important influences which hang about the memory, and give a tinge to the pictures of the imagination and a moulding to the heart. This kind of power now exercised by Matthew Henry upon us who are living, is perhaps equal or superior to that of any other person with whose private life we are acquainted. His habitual holiness of spirit humbles and stimulates us. His firmness in times of persecution and temptation rebukes our instability ; while our rancour and bitterness of speech are shamed by his moderation and considerate language. The maintenance of his public efficiency in connexion with the discharge of private domestic obligations, urges us to fill the public and domestic spheres of life without injury to the one or to the other. The remembrance of his diligence in study, his readiness to comfort the needy, and the careful, conscientious cultivation of

his own inner life, affords us a motive to "be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The mention of his name is a check to vulgarity, bigotry, and uncharitableness. And many families are made the happier by an acquaintance with his social virtues.

The value of his printed works is generally admitted by those who esteem earnestness of spirit, point of observation, clear exposition of truth, and adaptation to all classes of readers.

His memoirs of his father Philip have been pronounced by Dr. Chalmers to be one of the most precious specimens of Christian biography ever given to the world. The "Communicants' Companion" has deepened the piety of many who remember their Lord's death at His table. His volume on Prayer is a most excellent aid to devotion, and may be perused and used by all Christians with great spiritual advantage; and his various sermons afford clear and pleasing views of the principal doctrines of religion, and the

duties of ordinary life. But his great work, the work for which he is especially held in honour, and by which he is still chiefly blessing the world, is his "Commentary on the Bible." It was principally composed during his residence in Chester, and is believed to contain the substance of his Sabbath-day expositions, and to have been mostly written in the summer-house now standing in a garden in Bolland's Court, in the possession of T. Brittain, Esq.

I should be happy, if it were possible, to enable every one to form a correct conception of the nature and value of this Commentary, and of the real service which, in its production, Matthew Henry has done for the world. That, however, to its full extent, must be obtained by a personal perusal of its pages. Yet a few observations may be made which may perhaps conduce thereto.

There are three kinds of commentaries on the Scriptures, known to scholars and Biblical readers. There is the *Paraphrastic*, which

seeks to give the true sense of the text by putting it in a paraphrase of more ample form; in which paraphrase the connexion of the verses and ideas is more clearly shown, and all ellipses filled up by appropriate terms. The Family Expositor, by Dr. Doddridge, is an excellent specimen of this class. There is also the *Critical* or *Exegetical*, which examines, according to the principles of Etymology and Grammar, the precise meaning of the original Hebrew or Greek words, the true construction of sentences, and explains some of the historical and geographical allusions of the text. Bloomfield's *Critical Digest of the New Testament*, is a well-known work of this kind. And, lastly, there is the *Expository* and *Practical*, which states, in as plain words as possible, the real meaning of the text, arranges in their proper order the various thoughts or topics contained in it, notices all points of special interest, makes suitable reflections on the whole, and indicates its practical bearing on the duties, the

trials, the sorrows, and joys of every-day life. In short, it aims to set the teaching of the Word of God in such a clear light that none can misunderstand, and, in such a manner, as to afford interest while reading, and profit in subsequent reflection upon it. It is such a Commentary as this that Matthew Henry sought to send forth to the world.

The greater part of the Commentaries existing before the year 1700 were Critical, and far beyond the comprehension of the people generally. Indeed, these Commentaries do not pretend to be a means of spiritual improvement. They are dry examinations of words and phrases, and possess no charms to any one who is not habituated to classical studies. They are of the utmost importance to the educated, who are able, by their knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, to engage in such pursuits, and who desire to know, in some difficult cases, the precise meaning of the original Scriptures. May the day be slow in coming when our ministers shall not

be able to examine the "things hard to be understood" in the very languages in which Paul and the Evangelists wrote, and Moses and the Prophets spoke! Many of the books on the Scriptures, previous to the age of Matthew Henry, were written in Latin. Calvin, Bengel, and others on the Continent, sent forth their criticisms in the tongue of the learned. Poole, in his voluminous work, entitled "*Poli Synopsis Criticorum*," and some other English authors, also followed their example. I am not aware that there existed in the English language, at that time, a complete, practical, popular exposition of the Word of God. Whitby, Hammond, Poole, Owen, and others, contributed to the Biblical literature of their age. But even many of those works that were published in English, did not extend to more than one book of Scripture, or consisted only of scattered annotations, not of a continuous comment. Few, if any of them, were read by the ordinary hearers of the Gospel.

Now, it is to Matthew Henry's honour, that he was the *first to deviate from the practice of learned men of past ages*, by publishing in plain, understandable English, not in learned Latin; in continuous notes on every verse, not in occasional annotations; in a style somewhat interesting, not in the dry garb of bare criticism; in a fervent, devout spirit, not with the coldness of a grammarian, — a Commentary, which shows the meaning of the Word of God, arranges the ideas of the text in a convenient order, calls attention to every topic of interest and importance, deduces thoughts for private reflection, gives prominence to the love and mercy of God as seen in the life and death of Jesus Christ, and brings the precepts, the promises, the doctrines, and the events of the Bible to influence our will to duty, soothe our heart when troubled, warn us when tempted, and make us grateful in prosperity. Thus did he break down the barriers which the scholastic habits of centuries had raised, and afford

assistance to his fellow-countrymen to explain the treasures and enjoy the consolations of the revealed Will of God.

In making these statements I do not desire to disparage the services of other eminent men who have succeeded him. They have done a good work, and deserve well of our hearts. Nothing that has yet been written has exhausted the treasures of the Bible, and brought to light all its excellences. There is room yet for the most gifted genius, sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to exert its powers on that blessed Book. We hail with delight every new publication designed to draw attention to its doctrines or to elucidate its statements. One of the most healthy signs of the times is the increased attention that is being paid to the popular as well as learned exposition of the Scriptures. By this attention we are contributing to the instruction and comfort of the people of God, and placing our institutions and religious practices on a foundation of intelligence

that will outlive the assaults of scepticism, and the more subtle attempts of neology. But the honour we claim for Matthew Henry is, that he took the lead in this species of useful labour. More recent writers have reaped the benefit of his toil and experience. He has shown the way to give a sound and popular exposition, and they have adopted his method.

Many a philosopher has made more experiments, and discovered more important truths in the physical world than did Lord Bacon; but it was his distinction to point out the true method, and exemplify his method by a few experiments, and it is this that has made him the father of English Experimental Philosophy. During the past few centuries many an ordinary man has crossed the Atlantic and set his foot on the continent of America; it belonged to Columbus to show the world how it could be done. Henceforth the English merchant and traveller will find his way through the South African solitudes and

populous districts; Livingstone has found a place in the Temple of Fame, by traversing that district in loneliness, in order to be a pioneer to English industry and Christian missions. And Matthew Henry did what was never done before; he made the labours of successors comparatively light, as well as gave to the people at large a treasure which they will be slow to part with.

The Commentary itself is one that, on its own merits, deserves to be read and re-read by all classes of society. There is much in its spirit that will make it welcome to men of every religious denomination. There are hundreds of sentences, yea paragraphs, that could only be written by one whose heart was full of Christian love. The great aim of the writer is to let the truth be seen and appreciated. His reverence for what God has said is most profound. There is no trifling; no hyper-criticism; no undesirable aptitude for seeing difficulties and contradictions where they do not exist. He makes you feel that he is

conducting you to the feet of the Great Teacher of all, and awakens the teachable spirit he himself experienced. The general tenor of the remarks is intended to show the sense of the words in their original application and in their bearing upon all people. Matthew Henry's great common sense is apparent in the treatment of almost every subject he touches. He neither conducts his reader into abstruse reasonings upon unrevealed mysteries, nor dwells chiefly on mere trivialities. He is not one of those who reason high

“ Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate ;
Fix'd fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute ;
And find no end in wandering mazes lost.”

Nevertheless, there is much solid thinking, much accurate observation, that will gratify a strong mind ; and yet such plainness of speech, and pertinent useful remark, as to be attractive to the uneducated and lowly. It is remarkable that men of very opposite mental habits and intellectual powers have

found, in this Commentary, food for their intellect, and encouragement for their heart. That book must have in it something of sterling value which the cultivated and eloquent Robert Hall read through three times in the course of his life with deep interest, and which was daily perused by the devoted Whitfield on his knees. In this respect, if such a comparison may be allowed, Matthew Henry resembles Shakspeare, who is read with interest by men of all degrees of ability. It is true that the individual who desires to have lengthened philosophical dissertations on the principles involved in a text, or elaborate reasonings in support of a theory supposed to be taught in any given verse, must go elsewhere than to this Commentary. Its object is not so much to go round about a truth, as to put it in a clear light; not to prove its reality, but to show *what it is*. Matthew Henry makes no display of learning to confound the simple, and to attract the half-educated; he gives the results of learned

labour in the common language of the people. Although there is no parade of scholarship, the book is such as only a sound scholar could write. If he does not attempt to philosophise upon the doctrines of Scripture in the technical phraseology of Schoolmen, many of his statements in simple terms are clearly from one who understood well the philosophy of human nature. Taking a narrative or a parable, he usually divides it into several parts, with a view to bring out in order the leading truths. There is scarcely a word or incident, but that he will say "*note*," and then make some general observation of a practical character. He troubles the reader but little with disputes about the locality of towns or villages, and less with difficulties of language. When obscure or controverted passages are to be explained, he, in a few plain words, gives the opinion of the critics, and adds, "so some," or "so Whitby." Every comment is attended with observations of a practical tendency; and he

usually discovers some general truth in every particular fact or incident. Some may think, perhaps, that he occasionally carries this habit too far, and seeks to derive spiritual instruction from ordinary and insignificant occurrences that were never intended to afford it. This may be true in some instances, yet it is at least an amiable fault, arising from an intense desire to obtain all the practical instruction possible from the Word of God. After all has been said, I have never yet met with one of these general observations, drawn from particular common incidents, but that is a very useful truth, however strained the process of obtaining it may have been. There is also, oftentimes a point, a pithiness, a sanctified humour in some of his remarks, which make them telling, and add much to the interest of reading the Commentary. But the chief excellence of the Work is the clearness and fulness with which the great saving truths of the Gospel are brought out, and the earnest, kind spirit with which they are

expressed. One venerable servant of Christ,* now living, who has had much experience in preaching the Gospel, and has been honoured by man, and greatly blessed by God, gives it as his judgment, that "Other Commentators may each in some particular respect excel him, but he, for general excellence, and as a whole, in my judgment, excels them all. If all were to be swept away, and only one Commentary on the Bible to remain, I certainly would wish that that only one might be Matthew Henry's."

* Rev. Dr. Raffles.

CHAPTER V.



FINAL.

ON taking this review of the Life and Times of Matthew Henry,—on tracing his noble spirit of self-denial amidst the allurements of the world on the one hand, and the persecution of enemies on the other,—on watching the zeal, fervour, and intelligence with which he prosecuted his labours as a Christian pastor,—on observing the wide-spread influence he gained among men of all grades of intelligence and position, by means of his catholic spirit and conscientiousness,—on perceiving the purity, benevolence, peacefulness, and spiritual beauty of his private and domestic life,—and on considering the highly

valuable works he has bequeathed to this and all generations,—must we not assign to him a place among the wisest, holiest, and most useful men that God in his Providence has raised up in our country? His works tell his greatness. Our hearts feel his power, and we are glad to have an opportunity of testifying our esteem for his virtues. “The just shall be had, in everlasting remembrance;” and, certainly, the English language must cease to be, and English Christianity must give place to the former barbarities of Paganism, or to the cold, heartless tenets of infidelity, ere the name of Henry fails to have charms for the living.

We do not now attempt to discuss the comparative merits of intellectual and moral excellence; nor do we desire to show the precise degree of honour that should be conferred on those who attain to distinction in either of them. Intellectual greatness does, undoubtedly, command the homage of the mind in every age, and is often the means of

many useful discoveries in science, or of much entertainment in literature. That an ordinary intellect should recognise and pay deference to an intellect of unusual power, is in accordance with its own nature ; and that men should receive some expression of our obligations for the great and beneficial works they have done, is but the result of a natural obedience to the law of gratitude. Nevertheless, it is a fact, that far more has been written and done to extol those who, by nature or by hard study, have attained to eminence in the literary, philosophical, political, or military world, than to pay honour to those who, by self-culture, daily devotion, and untiring zeal, have been enabled to rise high in moral excellence and spiritual usefulness. It is a fair question, whether the highest dignity of all is not that which is associated with moral character ; whether the noblest heroism of all is not that of subduing the corruptions of the heart, controlling the violence of evil passions, and denying one's self, in the effort to become like

unto Christ in all things ; whether the most valuable and permanent usefulness is not that which saves souls from death, makes true piety prevalent, and gives permanence to philosophical discoveries, political improvements, and national prosperity, by causing the people to adopt the holy principles of the Gospel of Christ as the rule, and its pure and powerful motives as the incentives, of their conduct.

Among the many changes that are now transpiring amongst us, it is most gratifying to see a desire to honour those, who, by the weapons of a spiritual warfare, and by the power of a holy life, have contributed to the political and commercial elevation of England ; and more than that, have made homes happy with the influence of domestic piety, and conducted multitudes through the anxieties and struggles of an earthly pilgrimage to a home in Heaven. If we abide by the teachings of inspiration, we know that none deserve so much of their fellow-men as those, who, like Matthew Henry,

lay the foundations of national prosperity deep in the piety of the people ; promote the highest good of the rich and the poor, and enable men to live as heirs of a blessed immortality, while they pursue with diligence the avocations of this world. It is good for a nation to know its benefactors, and honour their memory. Hence it is to me a matter of unfeigned satisfaction that religious men of all evangelical sections of the church, from the Episcopal Bishop to the youthful Nonconformist Sabbath-school teacher, are ready to unite in creating a suitable Memorial of this honoured servant of God. To say nothing of the kindly feeling and Christian charity that will be exercised and strengthened by all parties thus co-operating ; to pass over the testimony it will give to the irreligious portion of the nation, that all Christians can be one in their common esteem for a good and useful man, and that to them the power of a devoted life is of more importance than ecclesiastical distinctions, — this design to do honour to Matthew Henry

will be a general homage paid to the Master he served; will raise the tone of national feeling above the exclusive admiration of men for their material discoveries, or warlike exploits; will strengthen the public sentiment respecting true Christian virtue; will lead some to see the growing power of religious feeling among the people generally; will be an encouragement to many who, like Henry, may suffer from persecution; and will diffuse throughout the land those glorious truths of the Gospel, which were the means of making him so holy and happy, and which must ever be the life and power of a great people.

It is now generally agreed that the Bible is the book that truly exalts a nation; and, that it is the sure guide to a world of purity beyond the grave. The strength of our Protestantism lies in our attachment to the Bible. The purity of our faith depends on our knowledge of what God has caused to be written for our instruction. The sanctity and peace of our domestic

circles will ever be proportionate to the facilities and disposition we possess for searching the "lively oracles." Men there may be among us, who, unmindful of the insinuating nature of error, and forgetful of the history of Christianity during the fourth and fifth centuries, and also desirous of extending priestly authority even to the most secret recesses of private feeling, are, perhaps, ready to establish, under the sanction of law, the ruinous practices of the Confessional, and, by a compromise with Rome, to lead back once more our liberty-loving land, to have its commerce checked, its constitution changed, its Bibles withheld, and its patriotism crushed by a spiritual tyranny that arrogates infallibility. Much as an Englishman and as a Protestant I desire success to those, who, by intelligent discussion, fair argument, and recourse to legitimate authority, strive to counteract and put away such unscriptural and un-English pretensions and practices; it is, nevertheless, my decided

conviction, that to give force and effect to these efforts, we cannot do better than afford increased facilities and inducements to the masses of the people to search the Word of God. If by the exertions of all evangelical Christians, an edition of Matthew Henry's Commentary could be issued to the extent of some 200,000 or 300,000 copies, and at such a low price, that the humble village labourer could soon save the amount out of his earnings, then, what with our 200,000 Sabbath-school teachers, our thousands of City and Home Missionaries, our tens of thousands of good, devoted artizans, and agricultural labourers, there would be such an increased interest awakened in the Scriptures, such a diffusion of clear evangelical truth, among families, as would be an impassable barrier to the propagators of error, and advance the cause most dear to the Commentator's heart.

Indeed, I cannot conceive a greater distinction conferred on that illustrious man,

and a more easy way of promoting our own national welfare than that, if possible, every family of England should be enabled to obtain a copy of this valuable work. We must not forget that these volumes are adapted to all classes. The more affluent do not always possess the high scholarship that is required to read the purely critical commentaries with pleasure and profit; nor does the perusal of dry criticisms on words and phrases satisfy the hungry soul of the erudite. There are few among our mercantile community, who are prepared to enter, with spirit, into the learned dissertations of Hengstenberg, or the refined criticisms of Rosenmüller and Blomfield. The pressure of business affords but little learned leisure; and men daily oppressed with the cares and anxieties of life, pursuing their avocations amidst the temptations and afflictions inseparable from human existence, desire, in their retirement, or family gatherings, something that will direct their thoughts at once

to the realities of redemption; unfold to their faith the meaning of the promises of the Gospel; point out the source of their strength; guide them gently and pleasantly to the fountains of consolation; exhibit and enforce the practical truths of Christianity, and bear their thoughts onward to the "rest" that "remains for the people of God."

During his life-time, Matthew Henry was the instrument of helping many a Christian soldier to overcome the "world, the flesh, and the devil," and without at all assuming to possess the gift of prophecy, we may safely affirm, that if the rich and the poor of England will unite to enable all to obtain his great Work, he will continue still to cheer the desponding; instruct the ignorant; strengthen the weak; guide to the Cross the unhappy; hasten on the time when no man will have need to say to his neighbour, "Know ye the Lord," for "all shall know Him."

And now one word more. While we desire to honour a servant of Christ by public ex-

pressions of esteem, and while we attend with some degree of interest to the record of his deeds, let us remember that we live in the land where he showed forth his virtues and accomplished his work; and that a participation of his spirit, and an imitation of his conduct, will give consistency to our more public manifestations of regard for his character. Yes, British readers, on the soil where that great and holy man lived, we live. Here his words were uttered and his writings composed; and here let us treasure up his sayings, and adhere to his sound doctrines. Here his body and mind spent their vigour for the benefit of that generation and for ours also; here let our strength be spent in the cause of Christ, that we may transmit blessings to generations yet unborn. In British streets he walked on his errands of mercy; and through British streets let our feet carry us to the abode of the poor and distressed. Among his kindred he lifted up his testimony against vice; and among ours

let us hold forth the power of a holy life. In the church he displayed the spirit of Christian charity; and in modern churches let bitterness for ever perish, and brotherly love abound. In his English home his joys were multiplied, and his sorrows experienced; and in ours let us receive our blessings with thankfulness, and bear our afflictions with resignation. In fine, where he lived near to his God, let us not forsake the God of our fathers; where he laid the foundation of the esteem in which he is now held, let us act that our "memory" may be "blessed;" where his remains lie, waiting to rise in a glorious form,—on the same national soil, if we die, may we sleep in Christ. Then shall we prove ourselves worthy admirers and successors of a noble man; and, while life is spared, from our hearts we shall each be prepared to adopt the language of one of his dearest friends, and say,

"Farewell, dear saint, thy memory is fragrant on earth; thy works will perpetuate thy

fame; thy spirit is retired to those that are perfect. I follow, though sinning, tired, and sighing. One motive more have I to quicken me in my way, that I may meet the loving, beloved, holy, happy Henry there."

THE END.

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